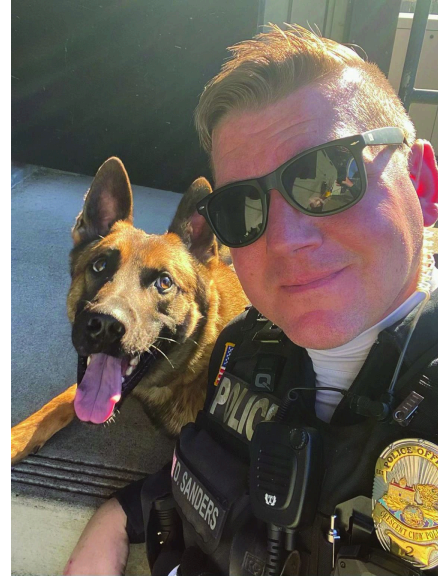


From Crescent City to Ukraine and back

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His connection to both the Ukraine and Crescent City is both emotional and mental, maybe even a little spiritual bond, having spent time in both places trying to improve the quality of life for people around the globe.

His personal journey has followed the path from Albuquerque, N.M. to Crescent City to serving as a Maritime Enforcement Specialist during a five-year stint U.S. Coast Guard to Khmelnytsky, Ukraine and back again to Northern California where he and his K9 partner Sgt. Kostya serve in the police department's K9 unit.

School Resource Officer Daniel Sanders holds a bachelor's degree in International Relations, with a concentration in NATO-Russia affairs and Eastern Europe. His ability to speak both Ukrainian and Russian led to a two-year English language teaching job in Khmelnytsky when his tour of duty was up.

"I would say I might have more friends in the Ukraine than I do here," said Sanders, who started his career with as an explorer in Crescent City, then as an intern and Police Service Aid for the Albuquerque (N.M.) Police Department.

"I wanted to finish college before I started my career in law enforcement, so I studied International Relations. It was pretty easy getting a job teaching English in the Ukraine. The standards weren't the highest and being a native English speaker, I was desirable. So, I wrote to a few English schools and they said – sure."

The application process was fairly simple for a guy that speaks Ukrainian and Russian, and the experience proved to be an invaluable learning experience in its own right.

“I taught (them) California English,” he said with a laugh. “I loved explaining the terminology of the words and where they come from.

“For some reason they were raised on American movies that used all these crazy slang terms all the time. The people were really interesting. The thing I enjoyed most about it was how really interested they were in learning English. To them, it was the key to success, and that’s pretty incredible considering how Americans take it for granted.”

His experience also included playing tourist, seeing things that were foreign to a guy that grew up in New Mexico and spent a great deal of time in California. Snow was pretty high on the list. Winter days, spending time at altitude, the architecture and culture were all a part of his classroom, his own personal educational process.

His teaching gig concluded in 2019. He came back to settle into his law enforcement career, putting his five years as a Maritime Enforcement Specialist, assigned to an Advanced Interdiction Team that specialized in counter-narcotics and force protection, to work in the States.

He has returned to the Ukraine to visit friends every year since leaving, even taking medical supplies back after the Russian invasion.

“I’ve gone back every winter since I left. The last time was December of ’22 to January of ’23. I guess I miss the snow. I love that first snow on the ground,” said Sanders, who has also worked for the Del Norte County Sheriff’s Office as a corrections officer and patrol deputy.

“The first year I went back, it was right before the invasion. People were saying Russia was going to invade and I remember thinking that’s ridiculous. I thought it was all saber rattling and a show of power.”

He is quick to point out he was never involved in the fighting nor were there buildings being destroyed by rocket fire where he was. He was there on a humanitarian mission, so to speak.

“I have many, many friends there. I went back on last Christmas,” he said. “I talked to friends of mine who were fighting over there and they told me they didn’t have first-aid kits or trauma kits,” he said. “They needed live-saving supplies for gunshot wounds and large trauma. Here, every street cop carries a tunicate. But they didn’t even have that.

“I collected and put together medical supplies. I had basic training when I was in the Coast Guard, so I was able to actually train these guys on how to use them.”

The Ukrainian connection to Crescent City actually came from that experience. Sanders was paired with his K9 partner Sgt. Kostya in 2019. He appropriately named the dog Kostya, which is Ukrainian for Konstantine, in remembrance of a friend that died during the invasion.

“Kostya is the first dog I’ve ever owned,” he said. “People are not wrong when they say dogs are man’s best friend. When I spend 10-to-12 hours a day when I’m at work, I’m spending it with the best partner I’ve ever had.

“I think (Konstantine) would think having a dog named after him was pretty amazing. I wouldn’t name a pet after him, but Kostya is a service dog, a warrior. Konstantine was steadfast and courageous and I think my dog has those same characteristics. He would make the ultimate sacrifice for me, like Konstantine did for his country.”