

Winnipeg car club looking for answers from city police

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Winnipeg Police Service canine member Reya and her handler Dennis Robert. (Handout)

A Winnipeg car club is looking for answers after city police officers were apparently instructed not to attend an event the group organized specifically to raise cash for the cops and for their canines.

The Manitoba Mopar Association had the support of the police canine unit leading up to last Saturday's car show, at which donations were accepted to go toward equipment for the officers and service dogs. Some officers had told the car show organizers they would attend the event at Kildonan Place Shopping Centre's parking lot and possibly even bring a dog from their unit, said Mopar group member Mike Arsenault.

"And then on Friday, the guys said, 'Sorry, we're not allowed to come.' And I knew that already, because I had received an e-mail from an inspector stating that he had to instruct the guys not to attend," Arsenault said.

The car club — whose members showcase their classic Dodge, Plymouth and Chrysler vehicles — is "not really sure what happened" within the Winnipeg Police Service to prevent the officers from attending, Arsenault said.

He wonders, however, whether police brass decided it would be embarrassing to have cops become closely involved with the event that was raising funds externally for their operations, highlighting a shortfall in city budgeting.

"Nobody can answer my questions," Arsenault said. "But I think that has a lot to do with it."

Despite the officers' no-show, the event featured more than 100 vehicles and drummed up \$1,350 for the canine unit. The money will still be given to the police service.

"People were just showing up and giving money," Arsenault said. "One lady came up, gave us 100 bucks and drove away."

The senior canine unit officer was not available for comment but a WPS spokesman said "senior members of the Service are consistently involved in making decisions to ensure that WPS resources are utilized in the most efficient and effective manner possible given each situation."

Marc Pellerin, vice-president of the Winnipeg Police Association, said the car show could have been viewed as putting the force "in a less than favourable light for not taking care of business" for the canine unit.

"It's fair to say that the canine unit has not been properly accounted for," said Pellerin, whose union represents the force's rank-and-file officers. "We expect a lot from these dogs and they work very hard."

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