



'Man's best friend' the latest addition to Manhattan's DA office

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Don't let those big, dark eyes fool you.

The latest addition to the Manhattan DA's office -- Bear, the four-year-old chocolate Labrador -- is a highly trained ally in the battle against domestic violence, elder abuse, and child abuse.

"Coming to the Manhattan DA's office, if you are a victim, can be a pretty intimidating thing," District Attorney Cyrus Vance, Jr., explained as he introduced Bear around the office yesterday. "So Bear is going to be a therapy dog," the DA said.

"He is going to meet with and work with folks who need emotional comfort when they are down in the DA's office," particularly when the office's new Family Justice Center opens by year's end, he said.

"It's his second day at work, so it's our newest DA employee," the DA said. "And he has the disposition of a saint."

Bear is on loan from a decade-old program called Puppies Behind Bars. The program places puppies with inmates at five prisons in the tri-state area, including Fishkill Correctional Facility in Beacon, NY, where Bear was trained and raised.

Founded by Gloria Gilbert Stoga, Puppies Behind Bars places its graduate dogs with injured veterans who need service dogs, or with schools for bomb detection.

"Bear was a service dog for a veteran who no longer needs it, and so he came

back to Puppies Behind Bars," Vance said. Bear still remembers one command from his patriotic previous assignment.

"Bear? Come on, get up, sweetheart," Vance asked Bear -- presumably the only DA employee that the boss is permitted to call 'sweetheart.'

Bear seemed like he'd have preferred continuing to nap on the carpeting near Vance's desk. "Now I want you to salute? Salute?" Vance asked, more a suggestion than a command. "Bear?" The dog complied, sitting up and lifting his right paw to his head.

"So now, Bear is going to bring his talents down here," Vance said of the docile animal, who will remain on loan indefinitely through the program.

Bear will be learning one new command especially for the injured victim's he'll be helping.

"The command will be 'Tell me a story,' and then Bear will come up and put his head on your lap," the DA explained.

"It's just for the puppy to be able to have contact and emotional interaction with people who really need a soft touch," he said. "And some empathy."

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