

Mahwah, Allendale deploy police dogs

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Baum and Patrolman Edward Simms of Mahwah, who handles Brut, said the animals easily earn their keep.

"The dogs' mere presence is a deterrent to crime," Baum said. Burglars "know they can outrun a cop, but they know they can't outrun a dog."

Added Simms: "There are so many things they can do for you, increasing the safety of the officer. It's so cost-effective in the long run."

Only two other Bergen police departments — Saddle River and Ridgefield Park — use police dogs. In addition, the Bergen County K-9 Unit has six. Representatives of several other police departments said the cost usually deterred them from using dogs.

Baum formed the Allendale Police K-9 Unit in 1980 with the acquisition of a dog named Guardian. At the time, Baum studied crime reports from Allendale and eight neighboring municipalities, and noticed a decrease in crime.

"When we acquired Guardian,

our burglary rate was quite high," said Baum. "We had maybe 52 burglaries for the year. In 1981, they dropped to about 35. Year by year, our burglaries decreased, down to where we had 18 for the year in 1985.

"It was a steady decrease over the years, where other towns decreased for a year or two and then they rose for a year," he said. "There is no significant drop in crime in other towns where canines were not employed."

This year, Guardian was retired, suffering from arthritis.

"He could no longer be reliable on the road as a patrol dog," Baum said.

He was put to sleep less than two weeks ago.

At the same time Allendale police began to search for a new dog, the Mahwah department decided upon a canine as well. Both called upon Bakersfield, Calif., trainer Tony Bairos, who has trained more than 200 dogs for police work.

"The dog isn't a ferocious animal," Baum said. He's a well-trained animal, and when needed, he will do his job."