

## **On the Positive Side**

### **Slow response to rattlesnake call frustrates**

**By Shirley Ipsen For the Sun-News**

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It was the cold snap in November 2010, when I returned to my home on Nana Trail. I got a more-than-usual enthusiastic welcome from my Min-Pin, who normally escorts me in my front door. This time, however he danced around the entrance but wouldn't enter. Eventually I realized he wanted to show me something, and he sure did! There was a huge rattlesnake coiled on our porch, certainly the biggest one I had ever seen.

Though I was raised on a farm and am handy with a pistol, I still thought this was something for Animal Control to handle. At 2:20 p.m., I called the humane society and was referred to Animal Control. The phone was "answered" by Central Dispatch. There was a recording with a menu. I pressed the Animal Control number, and after 22 rings with no answer or opportunity to leave a message, I called 911. The 911 operator confirmed my address and name and asked what the problem was. I told this person about the rattlesnake on the porch. The 911 operator advised us to stay away from the snake and 911 would contact Central Dispatch.

I kept an eye on that snake for 4 1/2 hours. He wasn't active, and I tried to guide him off the porch with a broom. He didn't respond to the broom. I gave some thought to chopping his head off with a garden spade, but by that time my heart had softened a bit. I didn't need to kill him; after all, he was just on his way to a long winter sleep and had made a wrong turn. I just wanted him away from my front door. He could even sleep under the porch for the winter, and we'd take up the question again in the spring.

In between, I made four more calls in an attempt to reach Animal Control and three more calls to 911. At 3:30, a real, live person answered at Central Dispatch, took my name and phone number, noting the problem. They also said they would contact Animal Control.

Animal Control finally arrived a 6:25 that evening, long after the snake had crawled ever so slowly under the porch and no doubt is under our house now. The officer who arrived complete with snake capture tool and apologies for the delay in response to my calls, could do nothing. I guess he thought there might be other snakes trying to hibernate under that porch and spring might be soon enough to find out.

All of us were moved by the recent atrocity of the beating death of a puppy and the failure of help to come. In the light of that, I felt I should share my own experience. I agree with the caller in that case - timely help from Animal Control is not available in Doña Ana County. The officer who came to my house told me that there were two Animal Control officers for the entire county! That is spreading it pretty thin!

I know, I know, it's the budget, but what do I do this spring when confronted by a hungry 4-foot-long rattlesnake in my garden? I don't believe rattlesnakes like radishes.

Shirley Ipsen is from Iowa City, Iowa, has lived in Las Cruces for 14 years, and is an outdoor enthusiast and rookie New Mexico gardener.