

## **On the Positive Side: Animal Cruelty Investigations**

**by Frank Bryce**

**Sept. 9, 2011**

Animal cruelty investigations doesn't sound much like a positive step does it, but, on August 30th, a week or so ago almost two dozen animal control officers, court officials and others completed an eight-hour course here in Las Cruces that is a positive step toward preventing animal cruelty and associated violent acts. The Humane Society of Southern New Mexico (HSSNM) and volunteers assisted with a continuing education course for representatives from Dona Ana County and Las Cruces animal control departments along with participants from Deming, Sunland Park, Alamogordo and Quemado. The training is part of a series statewide conducted by Animal Protection of New Mexico (APNM) in partnership with the New Mexico Department of Public Safety.

Summer before last, HSSNM brought Catherine Wolfe from Michigan to conduct training on prosecution of animal cruelty cases. This latest training focused on the investigative aspects of such cases. Eric Sakach, Senior Law Enforcement Specialist with the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), instructed the class. Mr. Sakach has been involved in animal cruelty cases for 34 years, serves as an expert witness in courts across the nation, and is a faculty member of the California Humane Law enforcement Academy. Also presenting information on some technical legal aspects was Scot Key, Senior Trial Attorney, Third Judicial District. Dona Ana county investigator Robyn Gojkovich and Dr. Patricia Norris, DVM, shared case experiences with the class.

This training continues to prepare officers for a variety of prevalent situations as well as more specialized cases. The participants learned about the link between animal cruelty and other crimes, procedures for search warrants, the wide range of possible incidents including common complaints, hoarding, illegal animal fighting, along with applicable federal and state law and safety issues.

The field guide Investigating Animal Cruelty in New Mexico for law enforcement officers being prepared by APNM and introduced at this training states "While most complaints of animal cruelty probably involve unintentional neglect that can be resolved through education, many experts believe that intentional or malicious cruelty such as knowingly depriving an animal of necessary sustenance or veterinary care, or torturing, maiming, mutilating, burning or killing animals by such means is largely underreported." The field guide further says "All animal cruelty is a concern because it is wrong to inflict needless suffering on any living creature. Intentional cruelty is a particular concern because it is a sign of psychological distress and often indicates that an individual either has already been a victim of violence or might be predisposed to committing acts of violence."

While the need for such training may not be a pleasant aspect of our communities, the provision and support for such training by state, county, local officials and organizations along with the dedicated participants is a positive and beneficial resource.

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