

# LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

## **ON THE POSITIVE SIDE**

**Commentary: Volunteer help with animal control**

**By Jess C. Williams For the Sun-News**

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Two years ago, an idea that grew out of a conversation of "what-ifs" became a reality when the first training class for Animal Control reserve officers was held at the Doña Ana County Animal Control Office.

Graduates from the two subsequent academies now serve to supplement the services of the county's certified animal control officers.

There are only eight ACOs to cover approximately 3,500 square miles of Doña Ana County. The certified and reserve officers work together to ensure safety and to protect animals from harm from other animals, as well as from abuse and cruelty inflicted by people.

More volunteers are needed, and the animal control unit of the Doña Ana County Sheriff's Department is once again seeking applications from residents willing to serve as animal control reserve officers. The deadline for applications is Feb. 12.

Upon completion of training, each volunteer will have the opportunity to play an active role in the improvement of animal welfare in the county. Volunteers are critical components of the county's animal-control strategy.

Training will be conducted on four consecutive Saturdays, beginning in February, at the Doña Ana County Animal Control office at 2024 E. Griggs Ave. in Las Cruces. Each session is three hours long. The training includes a ride-along component with a certified animal control officer. A graduation ceremony featuring Doña Ana County Sheriff Todd Garrison will follow the training period.

Program participants are required to donate at least eight hours each month to the volunteer program. Participation can include riding with an officer, working in the office or participating in educational programs in the schools.

Doña Ana County requires each applicant to be at least 18 years of age with a valid driver's license, be fingerprinted, undergo a background check and complete an application in advance of the classes. Applications are available at the county Animal Control office Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Contact the Sheriff Department's receptionist at (575) 525-1911, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. to find out when fingerprinting is available

For more information, call Doña Ana County Animal Control volunteer coordinator MaryIn Zahler at (575) 647-1477.

Jess C. Williams is the community liaison to the Doña Ana County Board of Commissioners and is the director of public information/special projects.