

**On the Positive Side: Extraordinary Sheriff's Department Veterinarian
by Frank Bryce
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With the proliferation of reality law enforcement and fictional crime show depiction of forensic investigation on television programs, many of us in Doña Ana County who have watched the A&E "Hoarders" show probably have failed to recognize our own Doña Ana County Sheriff's Department Forensic Veterinarian as she has appeared on several episodes. Patricia Norris, DVM, is a specialist in the emerging field of veterinary forensics which is the science of veterinary medicine applied to and suitable for a court of law. As such, Dr. Norris has been working with our Sheriff's department since 2007 and Dr. Norris focuses on the forensics particularly involving animal cruelty type cases. Dr. Norris graduated in 1986 and has practiced as a licensed veterinarian in Virginia, North Carolina and New Mexico.

Dr. Norris is the only veterinarian in the country working as a Sheriff's veterinarian that she is aware of at this time. She does know of several forensic veterinarians that work for animal welfare agencies but not law enforcement departments. A recent announcement indicates the New Jersey Society for Prevention of Cruelty of Animals, which enforces their animal cruelty laws, just hired a forensic veterinarian. Apparently there may be a veterinarian who works for the Federal Bureau of Investigation on bioterrorism but not forensics. That puts Dr. Norris in a select and unique set of special individuals.

In addition to her duties here in Doña Ana County with our Sheriff's Animal Control Department Cruelty Task Force, she has served as a consultant with Screaming Flea Productions producing episodes for the "Hoarders" program for a little over two years now. This started with an episode produced here in Doña Ana County several years ago. She has done 6 episodes to date in Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland and New Jersey. Dr. Norris describes the cases she has worked on all being different and having their own uniqueness. The New Mexico case had cats (and one skunk in a dryer). The Illinois case had chickens and other birds such as guineas, turkeys, ducks, and geese along with goats. Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland cases were with cats and a Louisiana case had dogs and cats.

When asked which case was most difficult, she stated probably the Hannah, Illinois case, due to cleaning out the containers housing the chickens in the cold pouring rain. She stated she loves the New Mexico sunshine and warm weather. Dr. Norris stated there were two aspects of working with the "Hoarders" show that she thought were great: helping animals that have spent most, if not all, their lives in horrific conditions and helping the people who are also living in those condition: and the crews that film the episode and work with the hoarders are just phenomenal people. They truly care for the people and animals involved and they are committed to finding the best solution for each one of these situations.

It is clear that Dr. Norris is a positive and valuable asset to our animal control program and contributes broadly to improving animal welfare. The Doña Ana County Sheriff's Department deserves a special pat on the back for employing this unique individual and this innovative approach to address our county animal welfare issues.

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