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Animal Control Teamsters Show It's About More than Just Catching Dogs

From Investigating Animal Abuse to Assisting with Police Drug Raids, Local 325 Wardens Work Around the Clock to Protect Local Citizens and Animals

Kelly Jeske carefully holds Angel steady on the counter and quickly gives the dog an injection in the shoulder blade area. Angel shakes her body and lets out a yip.

But the injection Jeske gave the dog was not a vaccination. It was the painless and inexpensive method of tagging Angel to identify her in the future.



Animal Control Warden Tom Dixon assists Kelly Jeske with putting a microchip in a dog for future identification purposes.

Jeske injected a microchip the size of a grain of rice containing the dog's vaccination and information just underneath the surface area of the stray dog's skin. The microchip is then scanned using an Avid® microchip scanner, which reads the chip to identify the animal.

"She's a little scared because this place is unfamiliar to her," said Jeske, patting Angel's silky head. "We'll find her a good home."

Tagging animals with microchips is just a small part of a busy job for Jeske, a Deputy Warden and Vet Technician at Boone County Animal Control in Belvidere, Illinois. The department consists of three animal control wardens that help the public deal with

problems caused by animals, and also work with other local agencies such as social services and law enforcement to protect the citizens and animals.

All stray dogs and cats that are taken in to Animal Control are tagged for identification and held for 48 hours, then are sent to various area rescue shelters. The shelters then properly place the animals in homes of owners who are carefully screened.

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Microchips are scanned and read using an Avid® microchip scanner.

“For every animal we place in a rescue shelter, we save the county \$40 or more in fees that would normally cost to spay or neuter each animal,” said Jeske. “Instead, when the animal is transferred to the shelter, the rescue facility takes care of the spaying, neutering and vaccinating before placing the animal into a home.”

Animal control wardens, informally known as dogcatchers, work to protect stray, injured, abused and unwanted animals but do much more than just catch the animals and take them away. Long gone are the term “dogcatcher” and the image of a man with a butterfly net.

“One time we responded to a call that a deer got into a grade school building,” recalled Tom Dixon, Animal Control Warden. “The deer jumped through a window and destroyed everything in the classroom. I opened the main entrance and eventually the deer made its way back out, but not until major damage was done to the classroom. Fortunately no one was injured.”

Boone County Animal Control is a government owned and operated animal control facility, certified and inspected by the State of Illinois. It is completely self-funded through vaccination registration by the citizens of Boone County.

“You just never know what the day will bring, especially when we are on-call 24/7,” said Rob Swisher, Animal Control Warden. “We get calls of all kinds from wild animal bites, to animals who were shot to death and left on the side of the road, to a horse that starved to death after its owners moved away and left the horse.”

In a recent incident, a dog was involved in shooting and criminal investigation.

“The dog’s owner was shot in the street, and the dog was grazed in the shoulder with a bullet,” recalls Swisher. “Tom was called at 2 a.m. to the scene, and he arrived thinking he was just picking up a stray dog. It turned out the dog was shot and Tom had to take him to the animal hospital for treatment and X-rays. The police requested the X-rays in case there was a bullet in the dog’s shoulder that they could trace to the suspect.”



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Animal control wardens perform a variety of services that help animals as well as people, such as: responding to calls of neglected, lost or nuisance animals; controlling stray and potentially dangerous animals roaming at large; and bringing abandoned pets to animal rescue centers to be properly placed in good homes.

A warden investigates reports of animal neglect or abuse, and is often the first person to provide comfort and compassion to animals in need.



Boone County Animal Control Wardens Tom Dixon (left) and Rob Swisher (right).

“Our busiest time is from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. in the summer,” said Swisher. “Kids are out of school then and are involved in a lot of our calls. Many animals get hit by cars in that time frame because so many people are out driving around.”

The wardens also work closely with the fire department, coroner’s office, sheriff’s office and the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA).

“When we’re not picking up stray animals, we’re dealing with fires, dead people, you name it,” said Swisher. “We get calls to pick up bodies and transport them to the coroner’s. We’ve also been on drug raids with the DEA to put the house owner’s pit bulls in traps so the officers could search the house.”

Animal Control also maintains files of all animals picked up or brought into the facility, and keeps records of all animal bites reported to the county.

“If we take in a pet that bites someone and the animal was not vaccinated for rabies, the owner has to pay \$20 and is given a citation for not having the animal vaccinated. When the owner comes in they have to pay the fees before we release the animal,” explained Jeske. “We had an animal in our possession, and it had an identification tag on its collar. When I called the number and gave the man a description of the pet, he positively identified it as his and came in to pick up the animal. But when I told him about the fees and citation, he changed his mind and said the pet wasn’t his, and left it here,” she said, shaking her head. “That happens a lot and it is very sad that people are not more responsible pet owners.”



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The wardens joined Local 325 seven months ago through a card-check agreement, and recently ratified their first Teamster contract.

“We know we are doing a good job servicing our current members. These workers came to us because of word-of-mouth,” said Russ Hanson, Local 325 Business Representative. “The animal control workers heard about how we negotiated an excellent contract with substantial wage increases for the Boone County Highway Department workers, and decided to get Teamster representation themselves.”



In their first contract, the wardens were ecstatic to get the wage increases and overtime pay they wanted.

“Before we were Teamsters, we would get calls at 2 a.m. to investigate a situation and wouldn’t get compensated for the overtime. Plus, Boone County has grown tremendously over the years, and with that growth the animal population grew as well,” said Jeske. “We needed more money to make up for the extra demands and work we were receiving. We turned to the Teamsters because we knew they could get us what we wanted. For a first contract, we accomplished a lot more than we would have done on our own.”

The wardens all agree that they are much happier now that they have a Teamster contract.

“We didn’t get a pay raise for years and the more we screamed for better raises, the more the county ignored us,” said Dixon, who has worked as a warden for more than 15 years. “Compared to other counties, we were earning \$4 to \$5 less an hour for the same position but with more responsibilities. The union was exactly what we needed to get fair pay.”

The wardens now have a stronger voice just like the animals they save and protect.

“We are the only ones who have a say for these animals,” said Swisher.