

# SPCA forms in Schenectady County

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Dogs and cats in Schenectady County got a little safer earlier this month when the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals approved the creation of a branch society in Schenectady.

With the recognition, the Schenectady County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SCSPCA) is the only nonprofit law enforcement organization in the county with the mission to prevent, detect and arrest persons engaging in animal cruelty.

"This SPCA has been in the works for over two years," said Chief Mathew Tully, who is also an attorney with his own private practice. "There are a lot of legal hurdles to clear because the SPCA is one of the only law enforcement entities not controlled by the government."

Tully said the SCSPCA is currently composed of two sworn peace officers who work closely with various police agencies throughout Schenectady County. These volunteer officers are fully trained, certified law enforcement personnel who have full police powers to arrest while investigating cases of animal cruelty.

Schenectady County Sheriff Harry Buffardi said his department would do what it could to assist Tully and SCSPCA.

"We can afford to assist them by providing them with training and our radio system," said Buffardi. "We can provide annual training for peace officers, updates in the law and needed links to communication. We intend to help any way we can."

Rotterdam Police Chief James Hamilton is hopeful his officers will benefit from the specific knowledge Tully and his SCSPCA officers have of animal crimes.

"We'd like to draw off their expertise," said Hamilton. "I'd like to put together a training seminar that we can send our officers to."

Tully began working as an SPCA officer in Suffolk County when he was 18. A survivor of the World Trade Center attacks, Tully was an active SPCA volunteer, attending to the search dogs at Ground Zero.

Tully, now a Niskayuna resident, said he hopes to clean up Schenectady's animal fighting rings. He said there is an ongoing investigation of at least two dog fighting "leagues" in the county.

More commonly, though, Tully said his officers will respond to calls of animal abuse and neglect. Tully said most cases of animal neglect stem from elderly pet owners suffering from dementia or other mental illnesses.

"They often times don't even know that they're neglecting their animals," said Tully.

Tully said that beyond working with local law enforcement agencies, the SCSPCA will also work closely with animal shelters around the county.

Tully said the one problem the SCSPCA faces now though, is a shortage of start-up funds.

He's running the SCSPCA out of his Colonie law firm, using his own vehicles, and he can barely afford the expensive uniform costs for new officers.

"It's about \$40,000 for training costs and about \$2,800 per officer in uniform costs," said Tully.

According to Tully, the organization, which is entirely funded through donations and is not funded by Schenectady County, must raise \$100,000 by June 1.

The group has raised \$5,500 so far in a fundraising campaign that started in February.

"The sooner we raise the money, the sooner we will be able to work on getting the people who commit these kinds of crimes off the street," said Tully.

Tully said people who abuse animals are far more likely to harm humans.

"These people need help before they realize the potential of becoming rapists and murderers," he said.

To contribute to the Schenectady County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, or for information, call 218-7100 or e-mail [press@schenectadyspca.org](mailto:press@schenectadyspca.org).

You can contact [marvinr@spotlightnews.com](mailto:marvinr@spotlightnews.com) with any questions.