



Officers going on patrol for pets: Schenectady County SPCA plans for 10 enforcement personnel by summer

By DAVID FILKINS, Staff writer
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First published: Tuesday, March 25, 2008

SCHENECTADY -- Animals in Schenectady County just got a whole lot safer.

Before this year, five Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals officers worked in upstate New York.

Now, following the creation of the Schenectady County SPCA, there are plans to have 10 officers based in Schenectady County alone by the beginning of summer.

The Schenectady County SPCA, a volunteer law enforcement agency that took nearly three years to organize and establish, works like a regular police department, except it focuses solely on animal abuse. "Officers have guns, badges, cuffs -- all that good stuff," Chief Matthew Tully said.

Tully, a lawyer at Tully Rickney PLLC in Albany, is one of just two officers currently volunteering for the Schenectady County SPCA. By June, he said he wants to have 10 officers trained and on duty. Former police officers are desired, Tully said, because they don't have to go through the 270 hours of training required for those without experience. And since all SPCA positions are voluntary, Tully said recruiting can be a challenge.

Becoming an officer does, however, offer an advantage for those looking to become police officers.

"I became an SPCA officer when I was 18 because I wanted to become a police officer," Tully said. "I became the youngest SPCA detective in New York state, then parlayed that into a federal law enforcement job. A lot of people use SPCA as a springboard to bigger and better things."

The SPCA operates solely from donations. On April 17, the Schenectady County SPCA is holding a silent auction from 4 to 7 p.m. at 441 New Karner Road in Albany. Prizes from bagels to 16-seat suites at Times Union Center will be auctioned off. Tully said he hopes to buy a patrol car and supplies in the near future.

Tully said the Schenectady County SPCA is investigating a few cases of dog fighting in Schenectady. Often, those investigations lead to arrests for other crimes, such as drug smuggling and illegal gambling. But the most rewarding part of the job, he said, comes when he doesn't have to take anyone into custody.

"The most enjoyable thing for me," Tully said, "is helping animal hoarders -- little old ladies who are well-intentioned, and before they know it, they are over their heads and have 200 cats. I've made over 100 arrests (as an SPCA officer) from drugs, guns and animal fighting. But helping animal hoarders is what's truly gratifying."

David Filkins can be reached at 454-5456 or by e-mail at dfilkins@timesunion.com.