

## SPCA Officers Need a Lift

County organization requesting donations to continue addressing animal cruelty



By John Purcell  
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To help those whom cannot help themselves, a local volunteer organization hopes residents are in the giving spirit during its time of need.

The Schenectady County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals strives to protect animals, but their aging squad car, which the Schenectady Police Department donated in 2008, is expected to see the end of the road soon. In preparation for the inevitable, the organization is asking residents to lend a helping hand to purchase the necessary transportation.

“If we were not around then it would become the entirety and responsibility of local law enforcement,” said Windy Wyczawski, spokeswoman for SC SPCA. “The benefit of us is at no cost to the taxpayer we are able to supplement those services. The law enforcement agencies that exist have a lot that is going on with them and they don’t have the manpower or resources to really prioritize these types of cases.”

The group is currently seeking \$20,000 in funding to help purchase a new vehicle. Besides reaching out to residents, donations are being sought from businesses for around half of the desired amount. The group is strictly funded on donations, so purchasing a new car is a big, but important, purchase for them.

Wyczawski said the group does deal strictly with animal abuse cases, but there have been

instances where the problem is really a much larger one.

“There are serious cases of animal abuse, for example such as dog fighting, that exist outside of those issues,” said Wyczawski. “There has been a couple of cases lately that have both directly involved domestic violence where the perpetrator is harming the animal as a tactic to intimidate, control, or as a revenge tactic where the consequence is the individual choose to leave them.”

She said the group is more aimed at community welfare now and besides offering an animal abuse hotline they provide programs, such as a responsible pet ownership class, detection and prevention of animal cruelty class and humane education training geared towards law enforcement officers. Also, SPCA is pursuing opportunities to partner with other community groups.

“If you think about animal abuse in the larger context of community welfare, I think it is considered a gateway crime and can be an important indicator,” said Wyczawski. “There is a correlation to animal abuse and domestic violence, she said, with early detection of the problem leading to a greater chance for a positive outcome through family counseling, diversion programs or community service.

“It is a kind of a cause and effect thing, you can’t address one thing without the other,” said Wyczawski. “We are doing it in such a way that we are considering our impact on the general welfare of the entire community.”

A new task force the group is trying to put together will deal with the issue of animal hoarding. In order to deal with the problem they are reaching out to the mental health community for help.

“There is escalating incidents of animal hording and we have a little bit of a controversial stand on it, but basically animal hoarding can be a part of some sort of mental illness,” she said. “Mental health tends to be involved, so right now we are reaching out to members of the mental health community to participate in the task force we are forming to provide a more comprehensive solution.”

Currently the group is comprised of 12 law enforcement volunteers and there are civilian volunteers trying to raise awareness about animal cruelty through education and fundraising efforts. SC SPCA is also a relatively new group, which formed over two years ago.

Animal abuse also doesn’t seem to be a problem that is going away anytime soon. Currently there are several ongoing dog fighting investigations in Schenectady County, she said.

“In 2010 we responded to hundreds of calls and I think we completed more than 50 independent investigations and in addition there was numerous collaborations with other agencies,” said Wyczawski.

Donations can be made to the SC SPCA by visiting their website at [schenectadyspca.org](http://schenectadyspca.org) or by sending a check to Schenectady SPCA, P.O. Box 9516, Niskayuna, NY 12309. The hotline to report animal abuse or provide an anonymous tip can be reached by calling 755-9517.

“We hope that people will consider making a donation to the SPCA, which is an organization that gives back to the community 365 days a year,” she said.