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Summer 2022

# Animal Tales

## Covey's Corner

Welcome to the Spring/Summer edition of Animal Tales! I don't normally feel the need to give a warning about the content of our newsletter. But in this case, I think it's appropriate. In this issue you'll read about a heartbreaking situation we see all too often when responding to concerns about animal welfare.

We hope that after reading about a group of animals we would eventually call "Oliver and Company" you'll have a better understanding of the more serious side of our operations. We also hope you'll feel a sense of relief that Washington County takes animal welfare seriously and has a team of professionals with the necessary skills and expertise ready to respond to any animal welfare concern that arises.

Last spring, nine dogs and one cat were discovered without food or water. Many of them were caged, extremely thin and living in their own waste. Others were loose in the house among debris, clutter and unsanitary conditions. Starting with an urgent call for help from concerned community members and continuing through swift action, hard work and compassionate care by Animal Services, the outcome for these animals was the best one possible.

Thankfully, most people will never be in the position to watch a criminal animal neglect case unfold from start to finish. In this issue of Animal Tales, we offer a chance for you to dig into the professional perspectives of our staff. They will share how they worked together to rescue and care for these neglected animals while also investigating criminal animal neglect, gathering evidence, and building a case to hold the owner accountable for their actions.

We start here on page one, from the viewpoint of one of the community members who found the animals in poor condition and made the decision to call us. We're glad they called and are grateful for their trust in us to respond in a professional and compassionate manner to what we know was a distressing situation. We hope after reading this issue of Animal Tales, you'll also feel confident calling us if you come across a similar situation anywhere in Washington County.

Warm regards,

Randy Covey, Animal Services Manager

## What it's like to discover animal neglect

By Mia Bonadonna



Oliver was discovered living with nine dogs in a neglectful situation. He is seen here happy and healthy at the shelter.

I am an animal behavior professional, and I'd like to share why Washington County Animal Services is dear to me. A year ago, I learned that my friend was having a crisis and when visiting their home, realized they were hoarding animals. There were so many animals, I struggled to count them all. The animals were caged, starving, emaciated, and had been living in their own waste. Some were too weak to walk.

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Like Bonnie Hays Animal Shelter on Facebook or follow @BonnieLHays on Twitter to stay up-to-date on happy reunions, events, pet news and more.

## What it's like to discover animal neglect from page 1

The floor was saturated with urine, and the wood had turned wet and crumbly over time under a thick layer of animal feces. Frantic dogs jumped on me, getting feces all over my clothes. The stench of ammonia filled the air, and it was hard to breathe.

The animals appeared underweight, had no beds, no food or water, and no clean place to rest. All furniture in the home had been destroyed, lighting was inadequate, and the bathroom and kitchen were unusable due to squalid conditions. Everyone has some idea of what animal hoarding might look like from news stories, but those stories do not prepare you for the nauseating smell, the sounds of desperate animals, or the sadness you experience knowing that animals and a fellow human were living in such horrible conditions.

I was not alone when this discovery was made; there were many friends involved. We realized very quickly that the needs of the animals exceeded our combined resources, so we made the decision to call Washington County Animal Services. This was not an easy choice. We knew our friend might face legal consequences, and the animals might face very long shelter stays. But we also knew the animals were suffering profoundly and that they would die if we did not get help.

An entire team of Animal Services officers, veterinary staff, police officers, and the Animal Services manager came to save the animals. They secured a warrant and then the team documented the condition of each animal. Some of the animals were in such poor condition that they needed to be taken immediately to an emergency clinic. The rest were transferred to Bonnie Hays Animal Shelter. I was so apprehensive

about what would happen to the animals, but it did not take long for my fears to fade when I saw the Animal Services team at work.

The entire team was deeply compassionate, not only toward the animals who were sick and starving but also in their empathy toward our mentally struggling friend whose animals we were trying to save. Manager Randy Covey and Field Supervisor Stacy Smejkal recognized that we were tired, stressed and worried, and they took direct action to help us understand they were truly there to help.

Instead of dismissing us, they invited us to observe their work, gave us opportunities to share what we knew about the animals' needs, discussed their own training and experience, and kept us informed of every step in the process of moving the animals to safety. The team listened to us and allowed us to feel like we were part of the solution.

I followed the case carefully. I was blown away by the gentle handling I saw from Animal Services, the treatment the animals received at the shelter, and the care that went into choosing adoption placement.

The animals did have a lengthy stay at Bonnie Hays, but it was undeniably evident that they were happy, comfortable, healthy and loved. My expectations were exceeded. Each animal's physical and emotional needs were carefully met. The transparency, patience and understanding afforded to all was so good that I have come to recognize Washington County Animal Services as the gold standard by which I judge all other animal services agencies.

The day the animals were seized and the months that followed were so difficult, but I still cry tears of gratitude over how Animal Services treated the animals and people involved that day with their lifesaving, humane work!



**A little less than three months after his arrival, Tomo weighed 80 pounds! That's an increase of over 86%. These gains showed that when provided with proper care, Tomo could maintain a healthy weight. Here, Tomo enjoys attention from Certified Veterinary Technician Natasha during his time at the shelter.**

# Anything but routine

By Stacy Smejkal, Field Services Supervisor



Penny and Field Supervisor Stacy Smejkal bask in the fresh air together. Taking a break from the investigative process to spend time with the animals helps our staff see the impact of their work.

At Animal Services, our administrative specialists answer and dispatch thousands of routine calls each year. Calls involving more in-depth considerations or those of a sensitive nature are routed to me as the field services supervisor before an Animal Services officer is dispatched.

Every situation is different and must be fully examined by the officer to determine what action is appropriate on our part. When I reviewed the initial call about the group we would later refer to as “Oliver and Company” (inspired by the solo cat named Oliver involved in the case), I believed this would be a routine investigation.

Despite that, and just in case, I decided to respond to the concerns myself along with Animal Services Officer Les Ico and the shelter’s two certified veterinary technicians. When we arrived and saw the condition of the first few animals, it became very apparent to all of us that this case was serious and our day would be far from “routine.”

I called Animal Services Manager Randy Covey with an update. I remember the first words out of my mouth were, “It’s bad, Randy. We’ll need to get a warrant.”

Our staff are fully trained and equipped to respond to a wide range of animal cases including serious neglect. Once we determined the appropriate actions to take given the enormity of the situation and the

condition of the animals, things ran as smoothly and quickly as possible. We completed the necessary paperwork and got a warrant to take custody of the animals and seize any other evidence in the home. Additional officers and our shelter veterinarian arrived on the scene to assist while our manager arranged for a team to be waiting at the shelter for the arrival of the animals. I photographed the animals and scene and assigned investigative, documentation and animal handling tasks to others.

From there, the animals were triaged. Those that were very sick and in critical condition were sent to a 24-hour emergency hospital, where one died despite receiving emergency veterinary care. The others were taken to the Bonnie Hays Animal Shelter.

One thing we always keep in mind in these situations is that the animals are evidence. They must be treated as such so we can build a case, with careful documentation and a clear chain of custody — while also providing quality care. As you might imagine, this can be a very complicated and carefully orchestrated process! Animals can’t be placed in an evidence locker and forgotten until a case goes to trial. We knew from experience that these animals would require constant and changing care over the coming months.

After the animals were processed and settled in at the shelter, the real work began. We dove deep into evaluating the evidence, writing our formal reports, and pursuing criminal charges against the owner through the District Attorney, with support from the Sheriff’s Office.

I could tell you that these cases never get to us emotionally, but that’s not true. It would be counterintuitive if these situations didn’t have some impact on us as caring, compassionate human beings. But as professionals, we don’t allow those feelings to govern our decisions or prevent us from doing the best we can with the job we are tasked with. We are trained and experienced in these types of situations. So, we take things one case at a time, making the best decisions we can for the people and pets of Washington County.




# Heart on fire, brain on ice

By Dr. Allison Lamb, Shelter Veterinarian



Koa arrived at the shelter starving, undernourished and weighing only 42 pounds.




During Koa's final weigh-in with us, he was 71 pounds. He gained 29 pounds in less than three months at the shelter! Koa is seen here playing with our shelter veterinarian.

When I was in high school my drama teacher would say, “heart on fire, brain on ice.” This phrase stuck with me. I come back to it whenever I find myself in a case involving animal neglect. It reminds me of the passion I have for my work as a veterinarian, but it also keeps my brain moving forward methodically as a situation evolves.

It is important to recognize that animals end up in circumstances involving neglect for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it's an owner's lack of knowledge or resources needed to provide adequate care. Or a rescuer who believes others are unable to provide for or love the animals the way they can and end up overwhelmed themselves. Regardless of the reasons, Washington County Animal Services sometimes finds itself involved in these cases. And when we do, our role is to not only help the animal, but also to preserve the case and collect evidence. (Learn more about forensic veterinary medicine on page 6.)

It is important for my brain not to get stuck as I race to both gather evidence and start animals on a path to recovery during these cases. Because live animal evidence is most relevant at the earliest stages of an investigation, I must use my training as a veterinarian to treat and heal animals at the same speed evidence is being collected. This is especially true for animals that have been without food or water for an extended period.



In situations where neglect is suspected it is not uncommon to see animals severely undernourished, as was the case with Oliver and Company. Their bodies had been using nutrients from sources other than their fat for an unknown amount of time. To survive, their bodies had been breaking down muscle, and what little energy their body had left was used to support vital organs. In extreme cases, when these final energy stores are depleted, the animal's organs no longer function properly and they can die.

Documentation of an animal's body condition, organ function, electrolytes and certain blood values are critical not only as evidence for the case, but they also help me make appropriate decisions about the animal's treatment. Cases involving multiple animals can take a significant amount of time due to documentation of the medical status of each animal and writing a report that will provide detailed and valuable information as the case moves forward.

We continued to care for Oliver and Company for three months after they were rescued. Careful monitoring and appropriate treatment allowed the eight surviving dogs and one cat to not only recover physically, but it also allowed their unique personalities to shine through again!

# Caring for neglected animals in the shelter

Our shelter technicians, who provide the everyday care to animals in our facility, adapt in the moment to any situation they encounter.

Normal everyday operations didn't stop for our shelter technicians when Oliver and Company arrived at Bonnie Hays Animal Shelter. The team continued reuniting lost pets with their owners, answering questions over the phone and in person, providing care for animals temporarily staying with us and more — all while providing specialized care for this new group of animals.

Daily care for this group included carefully monitoring their intake of food and water, rechecking weights, providing walks and enrichment activities to keep them mentally and physically stimulated, and extensive documentation of their care. The group included two blind and deaf dogs who brought additional considerations but quickly charmed the staff with their sweet personalities.

Reflecting on her time working with the eight dogs who arrived in poor health, Sheila, one of our shelter technicians, said, "Getting to watch these dogs improve daily was amazing. Exhausting, but completely rewarding! Not only could we see them gaining weight, but their coats were looking better and they were getting more comfortable and playful with staff. They became happy, healthy dogs."

Sheila is proud of the shelter technicians' work during Oliver and Company's stay at the shelter. "They reminded us about what we can do for the animals in our care and how important our jobs are."

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## Oliver and Company — The end of the story

When our staff cares for animals like the ones in this group, our job is to get them healthy while keeping records and preserving evidence of recovery. A little over three months after the eight dogs and Oliver the cat arrived at our shelter, the previous owner released ownership of the animals to us through their attorney. Up until that point, we were holding them pending the outcome of the criminal case.

The animals our staff had spent so much time caring for and nursing back to health were now healthy, playful and ready for new families. Oliver and the eight dogs have since been adopted. Their former owner pled guilty to animal neglect charges and as part of the sentence was ordered to pay the costs for the animals' care while they were with Washington County.

We are hopeful the outcome of this investigation and the recovery these animals made under our care shows the community they can call on us when needed. We are here to help.



Benny, one of the blind and deaf dogs in the group, shares a moment with Shelter Technician Carolyna.

## Bunnies and chickens and goats, oh my!

Last winter our Animal Services officers were asked by the Sheriff's Office to assist with handling animals during a drug-related raid. A few weeks later, our team was called back to the same site to collect and transport the goats, chickens, ducks and geese that had been left behind by the owners.

Our officers worked with the Sheriff's Office, an investigations team from Oregon Humane Society and a livestock rescue to contain the animals and get them to safety.

Our staff also had to reach beyond their dog and cat handling skills when we received a call from Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue last fall. A herd of 19 domestic rabbits had been abandoned at a station, left in a broken crate. Some of the rabbits had gotten loose and were running around nearby.

Two of our officers and a shelter technician were dispatched into the field where they worked with TVF&R to gather the bunnies. Although our facility doesn't normally house rabbits, our staff leapt into action to create a temporary bunny-safe space for the fluffle so we could provide this interagency support.

After their legally required stray holding time and a quarantine for possible exposure to disease, the rabbits were transferred to one of our partners to find new homes through their robust adoption program.

We're grateful for such strong partnerships with other organizations and to have staff so well versed in working with more than just cats and dogs!

A bunny is weighed upon arrival to the shelter.



## What is forensic veterinary medicine?

A forensic veterinarian uses their expertise as a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) to help answer questions and to collect and examine evidence related to crimes involving animals. Evidence may include physical examination of a living animal, necropsy (animal autopsy) of a deceased animal, or evidence collected from where an animal has been living. This evidence helps develop a case in support of, or to disprove, an allegation of animal neglect or abuse. This process is time sensitive, especially when the veterinarian is presented with a living animal. Evidence can be lost as lifesaving care is provided.

A forensic veterinarian must stay unbiased while advocating for the truth and remain within their area of expertise while presenting evidence in court. To help provide a fair trial, they must convey information in a clear manner to the judge and/or jury.

Although this branch of science has only recently been incorporated into the curriculum of some veterinary colleges, veterinarians have been helping law enforcement for decades. Although most DVMs involved with veterinary forensics work with animal shelters or animal protection agencies, even your own pet's veterinarian may get involved in a case.

Veterinarians in private practice regularly assist in criminal investigations, especially when no animal protection agency is nearby. Additionally, as of 2020, 19 states including Oregon require veterinarians to report certain crimes involving animals. This mandatory reporting means it could be a private practice veterinarian who sees the animal first and provides initial evidence of a crime.

Although this type of work may seem difficult, it is necessary. Animal cruelty is often linked to domestic violence, child or elder abuse. By recognizing crimes toward animals, veterinary forensics can also protect people.

At Washington County Animal Services, we have a full-time veterinarian with extensive skills and experience in forensic veterinary medicine. From the first exam to the final report and testimony in court, our veterinarian is an important member of our investigation team!



## Little kitten, big problem

A Good Samaritan spotted something moving at the base of a dumpster. When he investigated, he was surprised to find a kitten staring back at him! He tried to help the kitten but realized he needed professional assistance to free the very stuck, very unhappy kitten who had miscalculated whether he could fit his body through the drainage hole at the bottom of the dumpster.

Washington County Animal Services to the rescue!

Our staff arrived at the scene ready for all possible outcomes. With our field services supervisor inside the dumpster to hold onto the kitten's body and a shelter technician on the outside to maneuver the kitten's head back through the hole, the team "greased" the kitten up with Dawn dish soap. They then gently manipulated his fur, skin and ears to free him!

Although unhappy and a little soapy, the kitten emerged unharmed and was taken to the shelter to be monitored and cared for by staff.



Named for Danny Zuko's character in the musical Grease, the little guy found himself in a better mood after a few days of rest. Zuko has since been adopted through one of our partners.

We are thankful for the community member who spotted Zuko and called for help, and for our staff who used their animal handling expertise to free this kitten!

## What to expect when you call Animal Services

We receive over 17,000 calls a year at Washington County Animal Services. These calls require our administrative specialists to decide if an Animal Services officer needs to be dispatched (and how quickly), whether people or pets are in danger, and if animal-related laws or codes are possibly being broken.

When someone calls because they are worried about an animal-related situation, we ask for:

- The caller's full name, address and a phone number so the Animal Services officer can reach out to them if necessary.
- Specific information that will help the officer prepare for the situation, such as:
  - o How many and what kinds of animals are involved
  - o The exact address where the animals are located
  - o What the caller has witnessed that concerns them

If concerns about an animal could be a violation, a case is opened. A witness with firsthand information is necessary to start an investigation. This means we need to talk to the person who saw or heard the issue.

Once a case is opened, an officer takes over. "Taking calls is like being in a relay race. We get the information quickly so the officers can take the next steps in the process," said Administrative Specialist Jessica Fredrickson.

When an alleged neglect or abuse case is entered, our officers read the information and make decisions regarding priority level and initial response. In some cases, we have information about the situation the caller is not aware of and we are unable to share.

Sometimes we'll contact the complainant first for more information or a statement. In other cases, an officer will go to the location provided and try to talk with the owner and see the animals.

Depending on what the officer learns, the case can go in several directions. Possibilities include closing the case if we determine minimum care standards are being met, allowing the owner some time to resolve a concern, issuing a citation, or contacting other people who may have information. If the situation is serious and evidence supports it, animals are sometimes seized and cared for at the shelter, pending the outcome of a complete investigation.

"Our officers are some of the most thorough, caring and compassionate animal welfare professionals I have ever had the pleasure of working with. They take pride in doing their jobs well," Field Services Supervisor Stacy Smejkal said. "Thank you in advance for trusting us with your concern. Rest assured we will work hard to find the best possible outcome!"

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*We would like to extend a special thank you to everyone who donated toys, treats and other goodies to our shelter animals through our Amazon Wish List! You make it possible for our staff to continue to provide individualized care and enrichment for pets staying with us.*

# Thank you!





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## Donations made in honor or memory of special people and pets:

Many of our generous donors ask that their donations be made in honor or memory of a special person or pet. We list them all here together in recognition of the human-animal bond and our regard for our loved ones who are with us as well as those who have passed. We so appreciate these gifts and the many ways that people and pets touch our lives.

<b>Abby</b> Sara Love	<b>Asia</b> Susan and Brian Morgan	<b>Belle</b> Joy Bouchie	<b>Bonzo Garbonzo</b> William McLaughlin	<b>Brody</b> David Gray	<b>Candace and Terry Menninger</b> Helen Donaldson and Cynthia Wood
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## Thank you #BettyWhiteChallenge donors!

Did you participate in the #BettyWhiteChallenge? This social media challenge invited fans of actor and well-known friend to the animals Betty White to honor her memory by donating to a local animal shelter in celebration of what would have been her 100th birthday on January 17.

Our community really stepped up, donating over \$8,000 to the Bonnie Hays Animal Shelter!

These donations help us continue to reunite lost pets with their owners, rescue stray and injured animals, investigate animal abuse and neglect, and more.

Bonnie Hays  
alumnus Ace stops  
by the shelter with  
his owner to make  
a donation in honor  
of Betty White's  
birthday!



### Honoree Betty White

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Azure Allen  
Tim Allen  
Josephine Amalhas  
Katie Anderson  
Frank Angelo  
Betty Anliker  
Dwayne Anliker  
Rebecca  
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Bonnie L. Hays

SMALL ANIMAL SHELTER

WASHINGTON COUNTY

1901 SE 24th Avenue, MS 53  
Hillsboro, OR 97123

## Helping people and pets outside the shelter

This issue of Animal Tales takes a close look at the work we do outside of the shelter or “in the field.” At Washington County Animal Services, we call the specially trained field services staff who handle animal welfare investigations and animal-related code enforcement Animal Services officers (or ASOs).

In any given week, our officers might find themselves:

- Educating a community member about laws or codes related to animals
- Reuniting a stray dog with its family
- Responding to and investigating a dog bite incident
- Handling aggressive and dangerous dogs in the community
- Picking up a sick or injured animal and transporting it for care
- Providing animal-specific expertise to other agencies
- Investigating animal neglect and abuse

Our Animal Services officers work hard to help the people and pets of Washington County live peacefully together. The next time you see one of our Animal Services vehicles out and about, give our officer a friendly wave!



Longtime ASO Tim Locke heads out for the day, ready for anything that might come his way.

**Animal Tales** is a publication of Washington County Animal Services & the Bonnie L. Hays Small Animal Shelter

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Printed on post-consumer recycled content paper using soy-based ink.