

Community Voices

Dismantle 'Animal Cruelty Hall of Shame'

As a community, we need to step up, take responsibility for well-being of our animals

I am sick and tired of picking up the newspaper and reading about the lowest of humans who would beat a dog to death with a baseball bat, hogtie a dog and leave it to die in a field, stick an injured dog in a shopping cart and leave it to die in 100-plus-degree heat, torture a cat by duct-taping it and setting it on fire — I can go on and on. I disagree with a city animal control officer's statement in recent news story about the beating death of a dog ("Man charged with felony animal cruelty in dog's killing," July 23), which she noted is "uncommon."

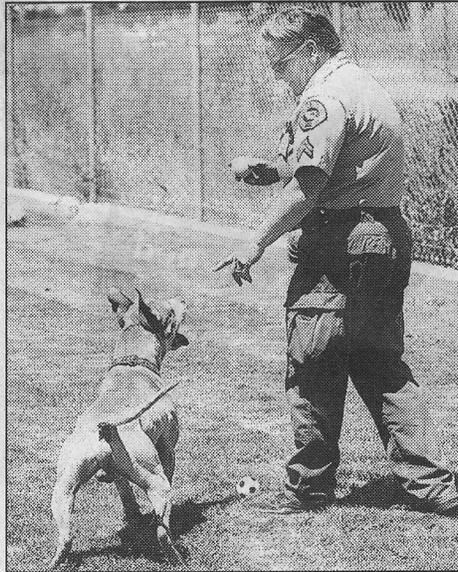
I beg to differ. These are just some of the cases that are discovered and get publicity. How many other cases go undiscovered of animals being abused, neglected, killed and treated as garbage (literally)? Most good and decent people have no clue of what kind of horrors go on because they cannot fathom that people are capable of such acts — or they don't want to know. A recent letter writer aptly described such crimes as Kern County's "Animal Cruelty Hall of Shame" ("Dog left for dead a disturbing sight," Cheers & Jeers, July 24). I urge you to please say enough is enough and take a few minutes of your time to send a letter, e-mail or place a phone call to our District Attorney's Office



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and our Kern County Superior Court judges to let them know that you expect these criminals to be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. I'd also suggest they serve time cleaning kennels at our county animal shelters, which would be a win-win situation, as our shelters desperately need the help and it might make these criminals think twice before committing future crimes.

Others who belong in our Hall of Shame are the pet owners who don't get their pets spayed or neutered because they're too lazy or ignorant to be responsible. I'm not referring to those who truly care about their pets and honestly can't afford it. There's assistance available if sought. I'm referring to those who claim they don't have the funds, but actually do and just don't see it as a priority. I've never owned a pet that wasn't spayed or neutered, but I would bet that most of those who claim they don't have the funds to spay or neuter their pets probably own nicer things than I own. Obviously, we all have the freedom to



HENRY A. BARRIOS / THE CALIFORNIAN

Kern County animal control officer Tracy Wolfe plays fetch with England, the pit bull that was found hogtied in a Lamont field in April. The dog was taken in by a Southern California rescue group in May.

choose how we spend our money, but if you don't value your pet enough to be responsible for it, then don't have one.

Another candidate for our Hall of Shame is the backyard breeder who makes his money off the misery of his "pets." These people help fill our shelters and streets with unwanted animals. It's a sorry state of affairs when animal groups from other counties and states come to Kern County to take animals from our shelters because of our overabundance of unwanted pets. Look at the classified pet ads in the paper, and you'll see the amount of money (tax-free) being made.

To those of you who feed feral and stray cats, but don't think you're responsible for trapping them and getting them spayed or neutered, you're contributing to the problem. Some 11,000 cats were killed in our county shelters last year. There is a local nonprofit that provides a trapping service for a small fee if you are not able or not willing to trap.

In response to our city slogan, "Bakersfield: Life as it Should Be," and the phrase a local TV station often uses, "The Spirit of the Golden Empire," I say hah! Granted, we are a community of giving, compassionate people, but let's quit patting ourselves on the back long enough to recognize that the way a society treats its animals is a reflection of itself. We are a community that continues to be apathetic to our pet problems. We also have a growing population of mean, ignorant, lazy and selfish people who don't know how to raise their children, much less be responsible pet owners. We must start making efforts to educate our children so they can educate their parents.

There are those who claim to care about

the plight of our animals. You agree it's a terrible situation and that something must be done; yet you do nothing to help. If you truly care, then it's time to start putting your money and/or your time where your mouth is. Anyone can afford to donate a dollar to the shelter or one of the many local animal welfare organizations. Become a volunteer for the county shelters or one of the numerous and growing local animal organizations in need of your help. If you attempt to become a volunteer and don't get the response you'd like, please don't give up. Go elsewhere. There are many organizations that would appreciate and value your service and talent. Take the time to write a letter, send an e-mail or make a phone call to your county and city representatives to let them know that you're concerned about our pet overpopulation problem and tell them that we need a low- or no-cost spay/neuter clinic in Kern County. I hear complaints from people and I always encourage them to attend the monthly Kern County Animal Control Commission meetings, where they have the opportunity to express their concerns, yet most fail to take the time to attend the meetings. They'd rather continue complaining. Your apathy is just as much a cause for our problem. I'm not being self-righteous. I don't exclude myself from our Hall of Shame, because I've been apathetic and need to give more of my time and effort, too.

To our Kern County supervisors (excluding Don Maben) and city council members: Might I suggest that you spend just one day at one of our county shelters? This should include time going on a ride-along with an animal control officer and time in the euthanasia room. I have no doubt there would be some quick and positive action taken as a result.

To our local media: Please consider putting out some public service announcements in English and Spanish about our pet-overpopulation problem and the importance of spaying and neutering.

There will be those who will criticize me for speaking out on behalf of animals and accuse me of valuing animals above people. I could answer that by saying that one issue has nothing to do with the other; we all have our own causes. Pick yours. But that's not true. There's clear evidence that animal abuse often leads to crimes against people. So this should be a concern of yours as well.

It's time for all of us to step up to the plate. Remember that we are killing almost 20,000 pets a year in our county shelters. This is not animal control's fault. It's ours. Let's make it become unpopular to own an unaltered pet, and let's make it be known that animal neglect and abuse will not be tolerated.

Stacey Augustson of Bakersfield is a legal secretary and a board member of the Friends of the Kern County Animal Shelters Foundation.