

The PAWSitive

* A publication of Riverside County Animal Services * December 2019 *

Other Stories

Page 10: *WHAT STORIES MISSED THE TOP 10?*

We loved the French-fry eating ferret left at Banning City Hall, but he and other critters didn't make our Top 10 list. And who could forget Coney the Burro? And there was that day two of our veteran officers helped thwart a would-be kidnapping? So, here's a quick flashback on a few of our "honorable mention" tales.

Page 11: *SAYING THANKS:*

We must say thank you to all of our volunteers and our friends at various nonprofit organizations that have helped us this year, such as The Animal Solutions Konnection (ASK Foundation), START Rescue, Society's Outcasts Animal Rescue (SOAR), The Mary S. Roberts Pet Adoptions Center and so many others! We cannot feature every volunteer, but here's three people that proved to be superstars for us yet again.



*** COVER STORY ***

2019 Stories of the Year

COVER PHOTOS: What a year! We assisted several burros (including a baby one), nursed emaciated dogs back to health, and even responded to a call about a cobra in Woodcrest. One of the most horrifying stories, of course, was when a woman in the Coachella Valley willfully tossed a bag of newborn pups into a Dumpster. Please check out the complete list on page 3.

2019 Top 10 Stories of the Year

Puppy Dumper Tops List

We're just about ready to close out 2019, but before we do, we at Riverside County Animal Services enjoy looking back at our most memorable stories of the year. This is a tradition we started more than 10 years ago and it gives us a chance to reflect on the stories that made us proud to serve our communities.

Of course, as with previous years, our days can be filled with some very sad — and horrifying — moments. What we take away from the more tragic stories, however, are the second chances we provide to animals treated poorly.



2019 marked a year we rescued emaciated dogs, assisted more than one burro from a strange predicament, nursed injured animals back to health, reunited a dog that had been missing for five years and even responded to a rare cobra call. (More on that “cobra” story in a moment.) Most of you probably will agree with our staff’s choice for the No. 1 story. Considering the Coachella Valley puppy-dumping case generated international attention, it was an easy pick for biggest story of 2019.

But don’t jump ahead just yet, folks. Pull up a chair and a cup of coffee or hot cocoa and please take a plunge into our Top 10 Riverside County Animal Stories of the Year!

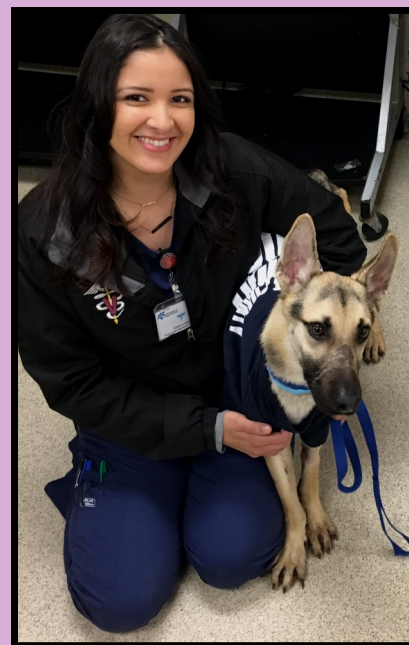
No. 10: Cobra!

‘COBRA’ SIGHTING IN WOODCREST AREA: We start our list with a silly story. Cobras are not a native reptile in the United States, so officer Adam Haisten was surprised to be heading out to a cobra sighting on Aug. 10 in a Riverside County neighborhood on Log Hill Drive. Turns out the cobra was the toy

-species variety. “Although rather realistic at a distance, up close the blank expression and rubber teeth pretty much lowered the threat level to zero,” Haisten said afterward “I couldn’t help but start laughing.” The woman who reported the cobra was embarrassed at first, but the officer assured her that it was a good thing that she was concerned for her neighbors. Although it may not have been the biggest story of the year, it went down as one of the weirdest.

No. 9: Skinny Jimmy Adopted

Jimmy (now Maverick) Adopted: The early part of 2019 seemed as if the veterinary staffers were dealing with several (too many!) emaciated pet cases — but also successes. Not too long after Bella the Cat was happily reunited with her Santa Barbara-area family (see Top 10 story No. 5), a second Santa Barbara connection occurred. This time it was for Jimmy the German Shepherd. Jimmy earned his more pleasant nickname after staff initially called him Slim Jim, due to his sad state of condition. At barely 23 pounds, Jimmy was half his normal weight for an 8-year-old. But that was his desperate condition



Animal Control Officer Adam Haisten captured this image (above) of the roaming ‘cobra’ after informing a concerned resident the snake was a fake.

Registered Veterinary Technician Krystal Angeles (right) hugs Skinny Jimmy during the period he was being nursed back to health.

(cont'd) when he was discovered in mid-February in one of the shelter's night-drop compartments. Within a short period, a Santa Ynez couple, Bonnie McVay and John Adams, adopted Jimmy and quickly renamed him Maverick. He now has his own Facebook page! Follow Maverick's fun adventures here:

<https://www.facebook.com/MaverickGermanShepherd/>



Jimmy (now named Maverick) weighed about half his normal weight when he entered the shelter (see upper left); He put on some weight fairly quickly, thanks to the veterinary services team members (top photo); Bonnie Adams, above, provided this recent photo of Maverick (left).



No. 8: Razz Berry

THAT'S A FIRST — DOG BROUGHT TO SHELTER IN CEREAL BOX: A cute, maltese-yorkie mix pooch was brought to the county's shelter in Jurupa Valley inside a Cap'n Crunch Crunch Berries cereal box on July 10. It was believed to be the first time someone had brought a dog in such a container. Apparently, the person claimed that she

(Cont'd) Razz Berry Goes from Cereal Box to Loving Home

found the dog at a park and it was flea infested, hence the reason for the cereal box “carrier.” Animal Services suspected that the would-be Good Samaritan was actually the owner of the dog and didn’t want it anymore, due to the flea infestation. Anyway, the photo dog inside the cereal box was so endearing that it did go viral. We nicknamed the dog Razz Berry and she was adopted by a loving family on the first day she was available.



No. 7 Reunion Assisted by Ring App

CAN A PORCH CAMERA MAKE PET REUNIONS HAPPEN? A Palm Desert man reunited with his dog at the Coachella Valley Animal Campus on April 8 after Trina had gone missing more than a year earlier. And it was a popular, porch-surveillance system that played a role in the reunion. Trina had apparently bolted from where she had been residing and ended up on a social media post after a woman’s Ring device captured a clear photo of Trina staring up at the camera. A buddy contacted Trina’s owner, Jesus Lopez, after seeing the social media post. This heartfelt reunion offered Animal Services an opportunity to remind pet owners of a very important tip. Although Trina did have a microchip embedded in her coat, Mr. Lopez did not register the chip. So any Good Samaritan — or animal control agency — would not have been able to contact him after finding the dog.



Left: Jesus Lopez and his girlfriend, Valeria Delgado, pose with Trina at the Coachella Valley Animal Campus. Trina, above, as featured on someone’s doorbell-camera app.

No. 6: Scooter Gets Some Wheels

Thanks to a donation from our friends at Mission Viejo Animal Services, a special-needs dog received a wheelchair to allow him some fun mobility, as seen here in this photo by Animal Services staffer Jennifer Millard. Below, Registered Veterinary Technician Gricel Llamas, below, straps Scooter into his wheelchair.

Want to watch him roll with the flow? Check out this YouTube video link:

<https://youtu.be/ZjvWdyXuzRM>



SCOOTER was one of those hard-luck cases we deal with occasionally. In late March, a dog with paralysis — possibly due to some type of spinal cord injury — was left inside a night-drop compartment at the county’s shelter in Jurupa Valley. Employees realized he needed one of those wheelchair-type contraptions and, fortunately, we had one in stock that was about the appropriate size. The wheelchair device had been donated to us by our friends at Mission Viejo Animal Services. Veterinary team members connected “Scooter,” as the dog was affectionately nicknamed, to the wheelchair and he loved it from the start. Due to the dog’s unique situation, our friends over at the Mary S. Roberts Pet Adoption Center in Riverside agreed to foster the dog until they were able to find a suitable, permanent home.

The PAWSITIVE is produced by the Riverside County Department of Animal Services. Stories and photos by Public Information Officer John Welsh, unless indicated. Copy Editors: Laurie Dozier, Elissa Messenger and Stefanie Rubio. GOT A STORY? Please send your stories, pet photos, and other ideas to shelterinfo@rivco.org (we LOVE hearing from our adopters!). Thanks for reading **The PAWSITIVE!**

No. 5: Bella Reunited

She Survived Two Months in Banning Before Rescue

Bella bolted into a culvert during a Banning pee break in early December. Owner Randy Hahka said he regretted letting her out to use the bathroom, but he was on a long haul from Goleta to Phoenix to help his mother with medical appointments. He presumed his pet would need to relieve herself but never imagine she would flee from him. He tried to coax the cat from its hiding spot, but she would not budge from the culvert underneath Interstate 10. Forced to leave to make it in time to help his mother, Mr. Hahka left the scene with a heavy heart. But somehow Bella survived the cold weather and predators and, ultimately, help

came from a kind employee of Coyne Powersports. The worker of the motorcycle shop on West Ramsey Street discovered the emaciated cat on a cold and breezy Feb. 6 and was so moved by her condition, he took off his jacket and wrapped her up for warmth. Officer Carra Mathewson responded and she said she knew it would be iffy if the cat survived. Weighing a mere four pounds, Bella was less than half her normal body weight. Veterinary employees at the San Jacinto Valley Animal Campus immediately put the cat on an IV and closely monitored her condition. Staff veterinarian, Dr. Sara Strongin, said she was amazed at Bella's quick response to treatment. Thanks to a microchip, the Hahka family was contacted and on Feb. 8 a tearful reunion occurred. WATCH A REUNION VIDEO CLIP HERE: <https://youtu.be/jzkQ4lhdiOU>



NO. 4: Baby Burro Corralled

It was not the first time one of our animal control officers responded to assist a burro in distress — and it would not be the last in 2019. A baby burro, apparently separated from its herd, was safely corralled by a Good Samaritan in the Reche Canyon area on May 1. Roger Eddridge and his wife, Judy Barker, cared for the critter at their Winship Way property until Animal Services arrived. Officer Christopher Peck responded and safely loaded up the burro. One of his colleagues, Registered Veterinary Technician Sharon Gonzales, immediately stepped up to foster the burro. Ms. Gonzales was up for the task, considering she has cared for multiple livestock at her property in Jurupa Valley. She bottle fed “Waffles” for months until, ultimately, she agreed to give the critter a permanent home. Here’s a fun clip of Waffles when we first were graced with his cuteness:

<https://youtu.be/rEesw-mkPLU>

No. 3: Left for Dead, Twiggy Gets Second Chance

Who leaves their pet behind when the lease is up at their apartment? That's what we were all wondering when Officer Cecelia Morris responded to a landlord's call for service. A dog was left in an apartment and the landlord believed the animal had perished. So did Officer Morris. In her 15-year career as an animal control officer, she had seen such neglect before. But this was one of the most horrid cases she witnessed.

The dog appeared to have starved to death in his filthy crate. Then something happened. The dog blinked at her. The dog was so emaciated — weighing in at just 19 pounds — no one gave the 3-year-old border collie mix much of a chance at survival. Officer Morris had responded to the call in November 2018, and it took more than two months for Animal Services employees to nurse the pooch back to health.

On Jan. 23, the dog, nicknamed "Twiggy," left the shelter on his second-chance ride with adopter Michelle Hill, of Norco. The dog quickly bonded with her horses as soon as he arrived at her property.

Ms. Hill and her family love Twiggy so much, they created a Facebook page in his honor. Check it out here:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/377197973094010/>



in



Twiggy, above right, is handled by Officer Cecelia Morris as adopter Michelle Hill bonds with her. Twiggy enjoyed running around at her new Norco home and said hello to Ms. Hill's horses. Above, Twiggy in her emaciated condition during her early days at the shelter.



No. 2: Beauty Recovers



Officer Will Luna responded to a call in late July about a dog that had been dragged alongside a truck, a reported accident according to some. Nonetheless, the driver of the pickup left the dog with a woman who claimed she would assist the animal. Beauty the German Shepherd ended up in the professional care of Animal Services' veterinary services team members. Eventually, after she recovered, Beauty found her forever home, thanks to Patti Byam. We miss Beauty so much. Despite what had happened to her, she was a super sweet gal.



TOP: Registered Veterinary Technician Erica Morrow examines Beauty's recovery.

TOP RIGHT: Registered Veterinary Technician Krystal Angeles captured this lovely shot of Beauty as she continued to heal.

MIDDLE: Animal Control Officer Will Luna comforts Beauty during her treatment.

RIGHT: Registered Veterinary Technicians David Urrutia and Taylor Moulton provide ongoing care as Officer Denise Westbrook assists.



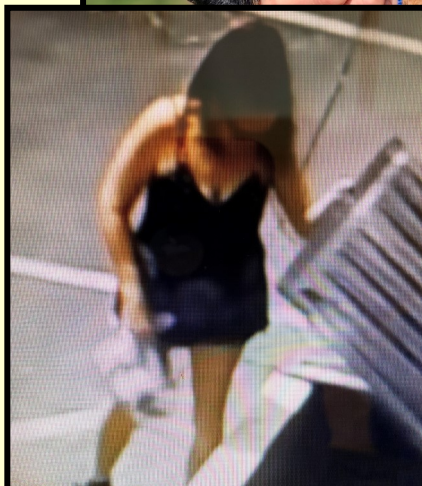
No. 1: Pups Saved from Trash



Puppy Dumper Caught on Tape; Arrested and Convicted of Cruelty

Just horrible. It was certainly one of the most shocking stories of the year — if not the decade. And it generated international media coverage. On April 18, a woman was caught on video surveillance willfully tossing a bag of newborn puppies into a Dumpster in the city of Coachella. Someone discovered the puppies in the container and, ultimately, the bag of pups were left in front of a Napa Auto Parts store. An employee of the Napa store called Animal Services and

officer Jose Cisneros responded. He retrieved the pups and rushed them to his veterinary colleagues at the Coachella Valley Animal Campus in Thousand Palms. The puppies were then placed in immediate foster care, due to their age and critical condition. The woman who fostered the dogs shied away from media coverage, but she worked tirelessly in saving the pups. She bottle fed the pups and six of the seven survived. The one that perished died within days of her care and was likely the runt of the litter, she said. All six have been adopted. Officer Cisneros worked with Napa to obtain the video footage and Animal Services successfully investigated the matter and presented a strong case to the Riverside County District Attorney's office. The suspect, Deborah Sue Culwell, was arrested at her home in Coachella, a property that contained 38 other dogs in poor condition. Animal Services seized those dogs and all were adopted or saved by partner rescue organizations. Culwell eventually pleaded guilty in August and was sentenced to a year in jail. She is restricted to own any pets for 10 years.



TOP: The pups shortly after being saved from the Dumpster.

MIDDLE: One of the 38 dogs seized — and saved — from the suspect's home in Coachella.

BOTTOM, FAR LEFT: The suspect as seen on surveillance footage, courtesy of Napa Auto Parts.

LEFT: These pooches were saved by Society's Outcasts Animal Rescue.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Here are some of the interesting incidents that were considered for our Top 10 Stories of the Year:



Bonus Burro Buddies: Two additional burro-related stories were favorites of Animal Services' employees. First there was Coney the Burro. Lt James Huffman and his colleague, Christopher Peck, responded to a call on Jan. 11 about a burro with a construction cone stuck on its front right foot. Lt. Huffman used a tranquilizer dart on the beast to allow officer Peck a chance to safely approach the animal. Just as it appeared Coney was going to scurry off, Peck dropped to one knee, grabbed the cone and removed it. Later in the year, officers



were on scene to assist a burro that was in a sinkhole. We must give a huge shout out to our new friend, Eric Guillen, superintendent of Murrieta Development Inc., for all the work he and his colleagues provided in safely providing an escape route for the burro.

Alert Officers Help Stop Alleged Kidnapping Suspect: On Jan. 17 two veteran Riverside County Animal Services were heading back from a staff meeting at the San Jacinto Valley Animal Campus



to their home base at the Coachella Valley Animal Campus. While on Interstate 10 near Cabazon, a woman in the back of a sport utility vehicle appeared to be in distress. "She was waving at us, as if saying 'help me!'" recalled Lt. Luis Rosa. Although they were in a white SUV, Lt. Rosa surmised that the woman knew they were county employees. "She must have seen our animal control uniforms," he said. Sgt. Miguel Hernandez called 911 and Lt. Rosa continued pursuing the car. Although the driver attempted to cut them off and tried to elude them, they kept eyes on the vehicle until California Highway Patrol and deputies from the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department took over the pursuit that ultimately ended in Yucca Valley.

French-fry Loving Ferret Abandoned: On March 13, Animal Services received a call from the city of Banning about an abandoned ferret left outside City Hall in a crate. Also left behind: bunches of french fries. Apparently the owner of the pet did not want his critter to go hungry when he or she left the crate at about 2:30 a.m.. The ferret did appear to enjoy the french fries. Officer Eric Mangum picked up the ferret and worked with state Fish & Wildlife officials to place the animal at an appropriate sanctuary. (Ferrets are illegal to own in California.)



VOLUNTEERS HONORED

Where would we be without our amazing volunteers? We love them and we are so very fortunate to have so many kind people in Riverside County. Each year, the county recognizes top volunteers for their efforts at the various county departments. This year, Freddy N. Bommer II, Rick Iacovina and Kelly Vela were honored as volunteers of the year for their work at the county's three largest animal shelters. Mr. Bommer and Ms. Vela were recognized by the Riverside County Board of Supervisors for their countless hours of pet portraits. Mr. Bommer, of San Jacinto???, handles pet portraits at the San Jacinto Valley Animal Campus and Ms. Vela, of Corona, captures amazing pet pics at the Western Riverside County/City Animal Shelter in Jurupa Valley. In fact, Ms. Vela hit a major milestone this year: In November she photographed her 15,000th pet portrait. Although she also volunteers at several Inland Empire shelters, we were fortunate her 15,000th pet happened at our location. Mr. Iacovina, of Palm Desert, is known for his work socializing with larger dogs at the Coachella Valley Animal Campus in Thousand Palms, where he has amassed more than 700 hours of volunteerism in the past four years.



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