

The PAWSitive

* A publication of Riverside County Animal Services * DECEMBER 2021 *

The Top 10

No. 10 — *DOG LEFT IN HOT CAR WITH FROZEN BURRITOS* (April 1): An officer removed a dog left in a car with frozen burritos and ice cream. This happens on National Burrito Day — what? Was someone playing an April Fool’s joke? Whatever the case: not funny. The dog survives and the owner was cited. Read more: Page 3.

No. 7 — *CAT HAT TRICK* (mid-November): Officers rescued three felines from unique situations in one week. One officer saved a kitten from a locomotive in Riverside’s Fairmount Park; officers assisted utility workers with a cat stuck atop an electrical pole in Indio; and an officer used a bedsheet to save a trapped cat from inside a chimney in Jurupa Valley. Read more on Page 5.

No. 6 — *CAT FLOWN TO OKLAHOMA CITY FOR SPECIAL HOLIDAY REUNION* (Dec. 16): Thanks to Southwest Airlines, a cat was reunited in OKC with a woman who raised the feline. Read the full story: Page 6.

(The complete Top 10: Please see bottom of Page 3.)

*** COVER STORY ***

Our Holiday Tradition: Stories-of-the-Year List



LAKE FIRE — On May 24, a fire swept across the Santa Ana River brush directly behind the county’s animal shelter in Jurupa Valley. Ferocious winds created an urgent situation. Although the Lake Fire incident received many votes, it did not top our annual stories list. What story was No. 1? Find out by turning to Page 11.

Looking Back at 2021

We started a tradition many years ago to compile our favorite stories from the past year. The stories featured in this special edition of The PAWSitive newsletter are the ones that our senior staffers considered the most memorable. Most of the stories are the warm-and-fuzzy variety. But there are a few hard-hitting ones, too. We hope these stories remind our residents and animal lovers everywhere the great work performed by Riverside County Animal Services' dedicated employees and the department's amazing volunteers and foster parents, to do the best job we can for our animals and stakeholders.

We continue to respond to cruelty and neglect cases, trapped or injured animals, hoarding cases. We hope, one

day, that we will no longer come across these sad situations. On a bright note, we are blessed to have such a caring public in our county. Residents of Riverside County are filled with empathy toward our shelter pets and visit us daily to provide a homeless pet a loving home.

These highlighted stories in the Top 10 include a flying horse, a cat trapped in a chimney that was saved when an officer used a bedsheet, a man that tried to remove a rattlesnake with barbecue tongs — and even a dog left inside a hot car with a handful of frozen food items.

One story that was on our radar, but we chose to mention it separately from our Top 10 is the incident that occurred in Thousand Palms in mid April. A man stabbed a dog to death and captured the act on social media. We responded to

remove the deceased dog. As it turns out, our friends with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department took the lead on that matter and, ultimately, took the matter to the FBI. A new law on the books allowed the FBI to seek federal animal cruelty. The man was convicted in what was the first federal case prosecuted under the new law.

We certainly do not want to hear about such heinous acts. But where animals are purposely neglected or harmed, we will respond and take action.

On a lighter note: To all of our adoption alumni and pet owners everywhere, we wish you the very best for 2022.

And thank you for taking a moment to read this list!



RECOVERY — *Animal Services Officer Shirley Rivera, above, bonds with Buddy, a dog whose owner suffered serious injuries in a hit-and-run incident in Riverside in June. Buddy was banged up, too. While Buddy's owner recuperated, our Veterinary Services Division cared for the terrier mix as part of the Healthy Pet Zone program.*

No. 10: Pooch Left Inside Hot Car With Frozen Burritos

It truly was a strange call for Officer Daniel Mora on April Fools Day.

An employee from The Living Desert told Animal Services Officer Daniel Mora of the situation when he arrived. A dog was left unattended inside a black Escalade parked at the Palm Desert-based zoo.

Officer Mora used an infrared thermometer to measure the vehicle's interior temperature. It was 104 degrees. Shortly thereafter, a Palm Desert Police Officer assisted Officer Mora by opening the vehicle and the dog was retrieved. He left an official notice on the vehicle's windshield.

Riverside County Animal Services' staffers at the Coachella Valley Animal Campus cared for the dog's recovery.

Veterinary Services staffers said they were stunned the 3-year-old, male Chihuahua was not overheated. Then they discovered the contents of his crate: two frozen burritos and five, wrapped, drumstick-shaped ice cream cones.

"It really was so bizarre that the dog was not suffering," Registered Veterinary Technician Emily Vialpando said. "Upon examination, he didn't exhibit any signs consistent with heat stress."

Nonetheless, she and her colleagues do not approve of the frozen-burrito-cooling technique – even if it was done on National Burrito Day.

"In all seriousness, it was about 90 degrees in parts of the Coachella Valley today, meaning the inside temperature of the car was much higher," Vialpando said. "And frozen burritos are not going to stay frozen for long when it gets this hot."

The owner was cited for 597.7 (as) – animal unattended in motor vehicle.

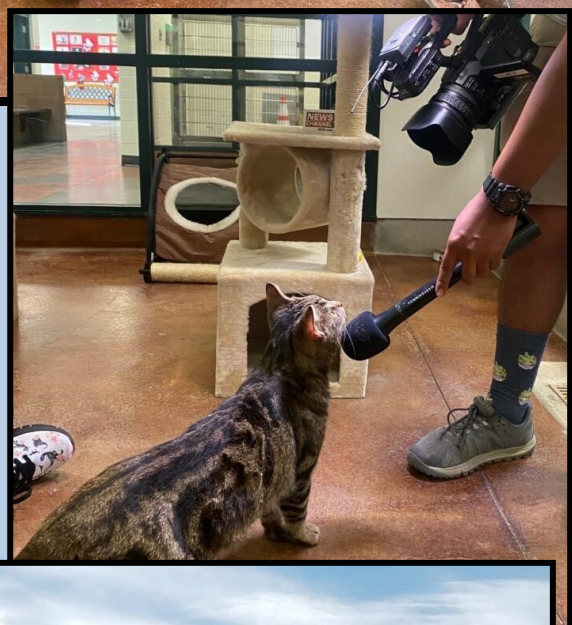
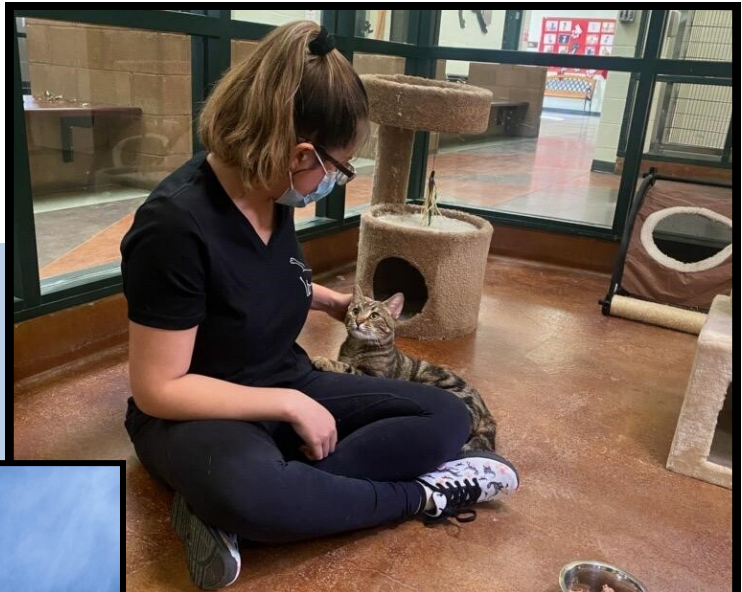
Yes, those are frozen burritos and drumstick-shaped ice cream cones inside the dog's crate. Chief Veterinarian Dr. Sara Strongin, right, holds the Chihuahua — and one of the frozen burritos. (It was not consumed.)



THE TOP 10 STORIES OF 2021 — No. 10: Frozen Burrito Dog; No. 9: Flying Horse; No. 8: Jo Jo Reunion; No. 7: Feline Hat Trick; No. 6: OKC Cat Reunion; No. 5: Man Uses BBQ Tongs on Rattlesnake; No. 4: King the Tortoise; No. 3: Mecca and North Shore Sweeps; No. 2: Lake Fire Threatens Animal Shelter; No. 1: Winchester Seizure.

No. 9: Flying Horse

No. 8: Jo Jo Reunited



While everyone else might have still been in a turkey coma, members of the Riverside Fire Department's Horse Animal Rescue Team (HART) and NART — the Norco Animal Rescue Team — joined forces with Riverside County Animal Services and the Riverside County Sheriff's Department to rescue a horse.

The horse ended up down a steep ravine in an area near Lake Skinner. On the Friday after Thanksgiving, all the teams joined together for a safe horse airlift.

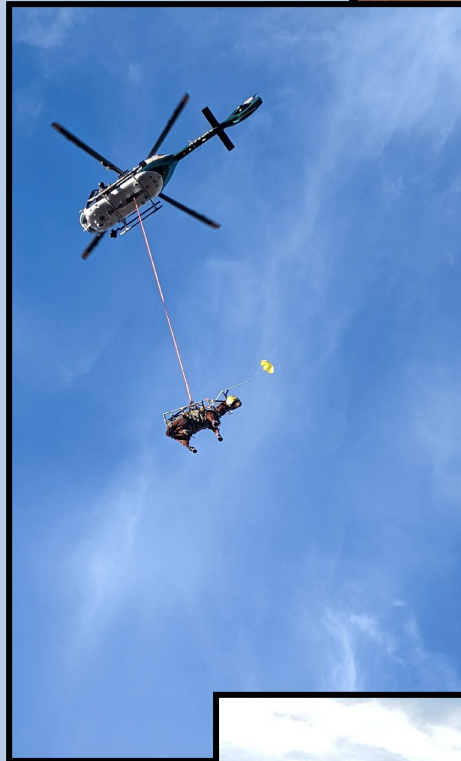
The horse, a 4-year-old gelding named Sunny, was treated on scene by an equine veterinarian prior to the flight. Sunny's sky ride lasted about 10 minutes and the landing proved successful and without incident.

Less dramatic — but just as heartwarming — the No. 8 story was a sweet reunion for Jo Jo, a feline that went missing and, apparently, was living in a storm drain for a couple of months.

Jo Jo, one of our shelter cats at the Coachella Valley Animal Campus, was scheduled to get neutered at our neighbors next door — Animal Samaritans. But Jo Jo said no to his scheduled surgery and bolted for the desert. He was ultimately coaxed out of his hiding spot and reunited with his adopter.

Horse airlift video footage:
<https://tinyurl.com/yypap79>

Watch Jo Jo's reunion footage:
<https://tinyurl.com/y2rlpyag>



DRAMATIC SKY RIDE — *Yes, that's a flying horse over southwest Riverside County. The aviation unit with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department provided the necessary skills for a safe rescue.*

JO JO GETS LOVE— *Laodibet "Lala" Chavarria spoils Jo Jo with his favorite treat: turkey slices; and Jo Jo handles the media.*

No. 7:

Feline Hat Trick

One in a Locomotive, Another on a Pole — and One Stuck Inside a Chimney



We could be accused of trying to squeeze three stories into one here, but we experienced quite the unique week in November when officers responded to three felines-in-need calls — and two of these happened on the same day. A cat — er — hat trick, if you will.

The first call occurred on Nov. 11 when officers responded to Fairmount Park in Riverside. A kitten somehow ended up in the smoke box of a display locomotive. The engine is more of a museum piece for park visitors to enjoy. The kitten explored the fenced-in locomotive a bit too close, apparently. It was believed it went plop down the smoke stack.

City employees assisted the animal control officers by providing access to the locomotive. Ultimately, the kitty was removed without incident.

A more challenging incident occurred in Indio on Nov. 16 when officers worked with utility workers when a cat was discovered atop some wires. Workers eventually saved the feline, whose happy family were grateful to have Ruth back home — where she'll remain an indoor cat.

On that same day in Jurupa Valley, Officer Christopher Peck pulled off one of the more interesting rescues in Animal Services history when he used a bedsheet to save a cat. Officer Peck tore up a bedsheet, tied the pieces together and then wrapped a loop around an rooftop air vent — then dropped the red fabric down the chimney where a trapped cat could not escape. (The fireplace had long ago been walled up.)

How the cat ended up down the chimney is a mystery — but the owner said the cats enjoy climbing a tree and exploring the home's roof, too. Would Officer Peck's makeshift ladder work? It did! The next day (Nov. 17) one of the family's Ring cameras featured little Rudy scurrying about in the back yard.



RUTH SAVED — Heather Padilla, top, cuddles her beloved cat, Ruth, after she was saved from a utility pole in Indio. **CHIMNEY RESCUE** — A photo, above, illustrates Officer Chris Peck's unique ingenuity to rescue a wayward kitten. **CHOO CHOO** — Officer Adam Haisten, left, investigates the smoke box of a train at Fairmount Park.

No. 6: Cat Flown to Oklahoma City



Toby the cat did NOT like his flight very much. Not at all. He meowed and meowed and meowed.

But his Dec. 16 cross-country trek was necessary to make it home for the holidays.

The 13-year-old, domestic short-haired cat, eventually landed in Oklahoma City where he was reunited with a woman who helped raise him.

Amber Jennings grew up in the Shreveport, La., area where she lived near her uncle, Kirk Copeland. He eventually moved West to Riverside. In late October, Mr. Copeland died in his Riverside apartment.

On Oct. 28, Riverside County Animal Services officer Mary Salazar responded to a call from Riverside Police after an officer noticed Toby inside. Within a day of Toby's impound at the Western Riverside County/City Animal Shelter in Jurupa Valley, Ms.

Jennings contacted the shelter and asked about reuniting with Toby. Only trouble was, she now calls Duncan, Okla., her new hometown.

"Toby meant so much to him and was his companion. Toby's also gotten me through many ups and downs in life and it's just the perfect happy ending – or new beginning – for us to have him home again."

The special flight was coordinated with help from Southwest Airlines®, which provided transportation to Oklahoma City and made a special exception to waive the Pet Fare. (The drive would be 1,283 miles and take 19 hours.)

"Southwest is honored to be able to play a small role in helping get Toby to his fur-ever home," said Alyssa Foster, Southwest Airlines Spokesperson. "Our Employees are known for the Hospitality they show each Customer, and we appreciate the efforts our Employees throughout the system made to ensure Toby had a special trip."

A nonprofit organization that helps with the county's animal shelters and programs jumped into action, too. The Animal



(One of our former residents.)

Did you know you can renew your dog license online? It's super easy and saves you time. Here's a direct link:

<https://www.rcdas.org/index.php/services/dog-licensing>



*The PAWSITIVE is produced by the Riverside County Department of Animal Services. Stories by Public Information Officer John Welsh, unless indicated. Copy Editors: Laurie Dozier 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 RivCo PAWSitive!***

No. 5: Man Uses Barbecue Tongs to Remove Rattlesnake

When we first learned that a man tried to remove a rattlesnake with — what? — barbecue tongs, we thought: well, that’s a first.

It’s actually a good idea to let our officers remove a venomous snake. When the temperatures spike, we start getting lots of calls for snakes. And get this: we actually use tongs, too. Only ours 40 inches long — a safe distance for sure!

On April 16, a man suffered a bite from a rattlesnake uses the type of tongs better suited for flipping marinated shrimp on a grill.

The victim turned out OK — fortunately. And he gave us — and at least one media outlet — an interview. The story went national.

We used his ordeal to remind folks that rattlesnakes can be dangerous and to give these slithering beasts some distance.

The victim was good natured about the incident. He asked to remain anonymous. He said the barbecue tongs were about 14 inches long, but joked in a text message: “Not long enough!” The snake bit him on his left hand, near his thumb.

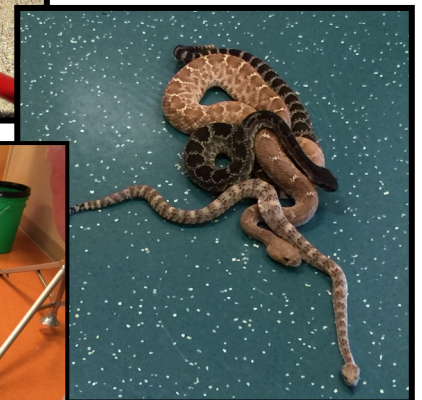
Firefighters from Riverside County Fire Station No. 64 responded to a property on Elderberry Lane in Sycamore Creek, a development just south of Corona. The firefighters provided treatment before the victim went to the hospital in an ambulance.

Officer Mike McGee responded to remove the rattler and euthanized it after he determined it would not be safe to release the snake near the community.

“We try to release a rattlesnake within one mile of where we remove it from, but it was highly likely this snake might end up in one of the adjacent homes again,” McGee said. “I didn’t believe a routine release would be prudent this time.”

“A coiled rattlesnake can strike the length of its body and the bites are painful and, in some rare cases, fatal,” Mayer said.

Mayer said the public can learn more about what they can do if they encounter a rattlesnake — and how to make a yard more rattlesnake-proof by visiting Animal Services’ web site: rcdas.org



SSSSSSSSSSNAKES! — Riverside County Animal Services officers get periodic training and education about handling venomous snakes. **TOP PHOTO:** Snakes used during a 2008 training. **MIDDLE:** Officer Will Luna removed this rattlesnake from an entertainment center in a Jurupa Valley home in 2012. **ABOVE:** Snakes observed during a 2015 training seminar at the county’s shelter in Jurupa Valley.

No. 4: King the Tortoise Reunited; Couple Found Him on Eastvale Street

April 8 was a happy day for King the Tortoise. He was reunited with his Eastvale family.

Our employees are suckers for a great tortoise reunion story. We've had quite a few in our history. In fact, this might keep our unofficial streak alive by naming a tortoise reunion one of our Top 10 stories of the year.

So, back in April, we received some media interest on the roaming tortoise after he first came our way. We didn't put out an official news release, but posted the story on our social media platforms — and that's how the happy reunited occurred.

King came to us by way of a very kind couple. Angela and Javier Pulls discovered the wayward sulcate tortoise in the middle of an East vale street.



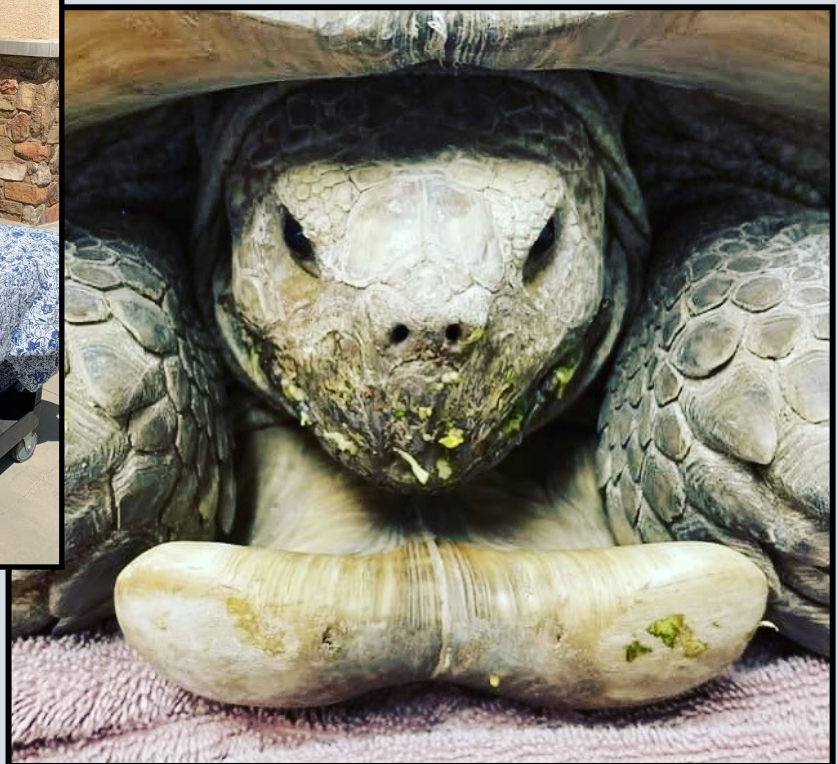
The couple cared for the tortoise after the Easter weekend discovery. They flagged down Animal Services Officer Adam Haisten during his routine rounds on Easter Sunday. Officer Haisten wheeled out the tortoise by using a skateboard owned by a son of the couple.

Initially, we nicknamed the tortoise Tony Hawk in honor of the famous skateboarder. Here is a link to a video featuring the tortoise when we first impounded him:

https://youtu.be/FVU_R_8WdZ0



King the Tortoise reunites with his family outside the county's shelter in Jurupa Valley after journeying throughout Eastvale during Easter weekend.



No. 3: Mecca and North Shore Sweeps



Officers conducted sweeps in the eastern county communities of Mecca and North Shore in late October after reports of too many stray dogs roaming in packs. School officials expressed concern about students at a bus stop.

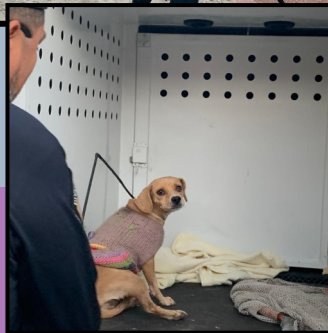
Animal Services officers working the far-eastern outposts of Mecca and North Shore struggle to retrieve strays because there are so many areas for the dogs to escape their reach. After all, these

communities are surrounded by open desert. That's why Commander Chris Mayer and Lt. Luis Rosa coordinate an all-hands-on-deck approach with sweep operations. The sweep on Oct. 27 followed an education campaign a week prior about the dangers of

allowing your pets to roam. The team of officers didn't just round up strays. They repaired fences where dogs repeatedly escaped. The officers also returned dogs to the owners who flagged them down in the streets after realizing their dog was one of the culprits caught roaming freely.

All told, Lt. Rosa's crew captured approximately

40 dogs and transported them to the Coachella Valley Animal Campus in Thousand Palms. Owners started showing up to redeem their pets shortly after the sweeps. Those animals that were not claimed were transferred to rescue organizations or rehomed by adopters.



TEAMWORK — Lt. Luis Rosa (top, right) and Sgt. Miguel Hernandez led a team of dedicated officers during an Oct. 27 sweep operation in the areas of Mecca and North Shore. **MIDDLE:** Officer Jose Fernandez with a stray dog that tried to escape he and his colleagues.

MIDDLE RIGHT: Officer Jose Cisneros carries a pooch from a yard in Mecca; the dog, atop right in his truck, did not belong to the homeowner. **TOP LEFT:** Sgt. Hernandez and Officer Fernandez mend a fence to prevent two dogs from getting out again.

Watch a video of the sweep:

<https://youtu.be/ISR8wfrVMzw>

No. 2: Lake Fire Roars Past Shelter



When a fire roared past the county's shelter in Jurupa Valley, everyone jumped into action to ensure animals — and employees — would be OK. It was a day that will remain in our minds for a long time to come. It's the No. 2 story on our annual list. Here's a recap of that day, May 24:

Animal Services staffers jumped into action as a river-bottom fire raced in the direction of the county's shelter in Jurupa Valley. The Western Riverside County/City Animal Shelter is next to the Santa Ana River and river-bottom blazes are a common danger. They're usually a result from those living in makeshift camps. The fires have come close — but never this close.

Shrubs caught fire within the property line and animal care and veterinary technicians shuffled fast to move pets from the treatment/receiving area — a building that is on the Santa Ana River side of the 12-acre campus.

Not one animal was harmed. And we give a special nod to our friends at The Mary S. Roberts Pet Adoption Center in Riverside. This nonprofit organization assisted by taking in a handful of the medical-needs animals.

Employees hustled to shut the guillotine-styled doors to prevent smoke from entering the interiors of the dog kennels. They also quickly relocated county and personal vehicles as ferocious winds spit embers toward the campus. An evacuation order was issued, but some staffers and veterinary technicians stayed put, sheltering in place, just in case the approximately 500 shelter animals would have to be immediately evacuated.



More than 200 firefighters battled the flames and water-dropping aircraft provided additional help.

Winchester Seizure Tops 2021 Stories

Stories of neglect and cruelty always resonate with Animal Services employees. It would likely come to no one's surprise that the No. 1 story of 2021 is the seizure of more than 70 dogs from an empty field in Winchester.

Animal Services served a seizure warrant on a man who had been living on land he did not own in an unincorporated Riverside County area in Winchester. The property, located on Simpson Road just west of Winchester Road, had been used by the man as a makeshift dog rescue – but he did not have a kennel permit to have dozens of dogs.

More than 70 dogs were kept in single kennels and some were bunched up in pen-like structures. A buildup of animal waste created a fly infestation and some dogs suffered from flystrike in their ears.

On Aug. 11, Animal Services worked in concert with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department and Riverside County Code Enforcement to serve the seizure warrant. The man, John Dunlap, was ultimately arrested on suspicion of trespassing and placed on a medical hold. He was transported from the property in an ambulance. Code Enforcement officers posted notices of violation on the various structures and vehicles at the site.

Animal Services cited him for a kennel violation and seized the dogs. Officers transported the dogs to the county's San Jacinto Valley Animal Campus where they all received veterinary examinations and were checked for microchips. Roughly 50 of the 76 dogs had chips. However, many were registered to Mr. Dunlap. Some dogs were registered to rescue organizations that no longer wanted responsibility. Although Mr. Dunlap could have requested a post-seizure hearing, he failed to do so and now Animal Services started placing the dogs into foster homes and reputable rescue organizations.

All told, there were 76 dogs in total. Animal Services was forced to euthanize five of the 76; three were euthanized due to severe health conditions and two were euthanized for aggressive traits.



MAKESHIFT RESCUE IN WINCHESTER — Dogs were kept in makeshift kennels, including some filled with feces. Many of the dogs suffered from fly strike.

HONORABLE MENTIONS



We have a hard time picking our Top 10 stories — and we hate leaving out stories that made us feel good about the work we do. Here are some stories that did not make the Top 10 cut, but we hope our fans will appreciate these getting honorable mentions.

BURRO WITH PIPE: *We have assisted many burros with strange circumstances. This time, in late October, we captured a burro with a piece of pipe stuck on its front right hoof. Our friends at Southern California Equine Hospital in Norco handled the removal of the foreign object and the burro was released to DonkeyLand for further observation and care.*

BUDDY & THEODORE: *When a man suffered serious injuries in a late-May, hit-and-run incident in Riverside, his dog was hurt, too. We treated and cared for his dog, Buddy, until the owner, Theodore, was released from the hospital in early June. The man's son assisted with the happy reunion.*



DOG IN CANAL: *Officer Eric Espejo assisted in the rescue of a dog in a canal in Mecca in early November. Our friends with CAL FIRE/Riverside County Fire Department played a major role, too. The golden retriever mix was*

transported to the Coachella Valley Animal Campus and, ultimately, rehomed by a loving adopter.



MONKEY BUSINESS: *A Rialto officer impounded a capuchin monkey in early December. We helped coordinate the monkey's transfer to a sanctuary in Phelan.*

HONORABLE MENTIONS, Cont'd

Here are a few more stories that resonated with our team. We hope they help remind everyone of the good work performed by Animal Services' employees. Thank you for the privilege of serving all of you.

MR. BUR: *In early November, a dog was impounded at the Jurupa Valley shelter location with a matted coat and filled with burs. The team got to work, but it took almost three hours to finally get "Mr. Bur" into much better shape. Registered Veterinary Technician Krystal Angeles and her colleague, Andrea Franco — and others — provided Mr. Bur the necessary care he deserved. He was eventually transferred to one of Animal Services' rescue partners.*



HOPE THE HORSE: *Officer Adam Haisten responded to a call about an abandoned horse in the Good Hope area on June 4. The severely neglected horse, he discovered, was also blind. He found a discarded bucket nearby and provided the animal water. The horse was transported to the county shelter in Jurupa Valley and eventually rescued by a Cherry Valley-based equine organization called Far From Perfect Mustang Rescue. Watch a video with Hope the Horse:*



<https://tinyurl.com/y6q3lycy>

ENGINE KITTEN: *In early May, Officer John Hergenreder was touched by the caring people at an auto mechanics shop that helped save a kitten trapped inside an engine compartment. The business, Ramona Tire, agreed to assist the officer — and car owner — to save a kitten's life. Prior to the car owner driving the vehicle to the nearby shop, Officer Hergenreder noticed a female cat and showing much interest in the car and the meowing kitten. He realized that the stray must be the mother cat, so he netted her. Ramona Tire rescued the kitty and the officer reunited the kitten with its mother at the county shelter in Jurupa Valley.*



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