

# **THE 2016**

# RIVERSIDE COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES STORIES OF THE YEAR

As we near another year's close, we always love to look back at all the stories that made us happy as a puppy and brought smiles to our faces. Each year we like to share these significant stories of the year. Of course, some of the big stories include the types that make us cringe or cry. That's just the nature of the beast when you work at Riverside County Animal Services. We deal with life and death and life-changing events. We especially love saving pets. But we also take pride in our animal-cruelty investigations and making sure that those who harm the innocent and the voiceless are brought to justice. Here is our list of the Top 10 Stories of the Year for 2016. We hope you appreciate this list. The Top 10 stories are listed chronologically.

### **JANUARY**

# OPOSSUM — SHOT WITH ARROW BOLTS — SURVIVES

Someone shot an opossum with two arrow bolts, but the wild animal somehow survived the sick, cruel act. A Riverside County animal control officer retrieved the critter from a neighborhood in Riverside's La Sierra area. Officer Jennifer Selter rushed the opossum to the Western Riverside County/City Animal Shelter in Jurupa Valley and a staff veterinarian miraculously removed the arrow bolts. The animal survived. It was later transported to Sunshine Haven Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation, a nonprofit organization based in Riverside.

### **FEBRUARY**

# CARJACKED MAN REUNITED WITH BELOVED DOG, LOLA



A criminal carjacked a Grand Terrace man outside one of his favorite eateries, Tony's Mexican Food in San Bernardino on Feb. 8. Victim Donald Mittica could care less about the car. He feared he would never see his beloved terrier mix, Lola, ever again. Lola was inside the car when the carjacking occurred. A few days later,



just by chance, a UC Riverside student spotted the dog wandering aimlessly in Riverside. She scooped up the dog and brought her to the Western Riverside County/City Animal Shelter in Jurupa Valley. Lola had a microchip so Mr. Mittica was contacted immediately. He was joyful and almost in tears, as could be seen in some of these television news accounts, below.

Here is link to the story by KCAL/KCBS reporter Crystal Cruz:

http://losangeles.cbslocal.com/2016/02/10/dogowner-80-reunited-with-stolen-poochfollowing-violent-carjacking/

And here's a link to the story by Rob McMillan for KABC Eyewitness News:

http://abc7.com/society/dog-reunited-with-owner-after-being-taken-during-carjacking/1197099/

Want one more? Here is reporter Imran Ghori's Lola tale for The Press-Enterprise newspaper, which includes a powerful reunion photo by veteran photographer David Bauman: <a href="http://www.pe.com/articles/dog-793992-car-taken.html">http://www.pe.com/articles/dog-793992-car-taken.html</a>

#### **FEBRUARY**

# BURMESE PYTHON DISCOVERED AT LOCAL DUMP

This won't go down as the most pleasant story to remember, but we could not help ourselves in this one making our Top 10 list. One of our animal control officers had the unfortunate task of retrieving a 17-foot, 7-inch long albino Burmese python from the Agua Mansa Transfer Station, a facility operated by Burrtec Waste In-

dustries in a northwest pocket of Riverside. Please note: don't dump your dead snake in the trash. The reptile was already dead and we do not know how it died. But it sure became a popular item on our YouTube channel. At last count, more than 28,000 people had clicked on the video (which is pretty good for us). But the Burmese doesn't even move, making it even more bizarre, perhaps, that 28,000 or so people would want to click on a video link showing a dead snake. If you missed watching a short video about a big, dead snake, here you go: <a href="https://">https://</a>

www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSBFliYxLC4

### **MAY**

# BETTY RUBBLE RETURNS HOME TO BARNEY

The story of Betty Rubble, the 22-year-old sulcata tortoise, was worth a chuckle. She returned home to her backyard buddy, Barney Rubble,





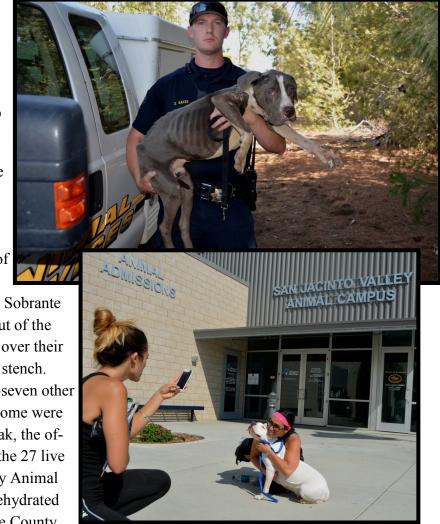
thanks to the watchful eyes of Riverside Police. Betty was found in the back seat of a stolen car in early May, but the bandits were snagged and the kind officers transported Betty to the Western Riverside County/City Animal Shelter in Jurupa Valley.

### JULY

# OFFICERS SEIZE EMACIATED DOGS

It was disgusting. It was grisly. It was animal cruelty in a most severe way. Riverside County Animal Services officers were forced to step over dead dogs and animal waste to find the survivors. On July 18, on what was almost a triple-digit day, a team of officers performed an investigation at a

property on Avocado Lane, just north of El Sobrante Road. A smell of death permeated in and out of the ranch-style home. The officers used masks over their noses and mouths to avoid breathing in the stench. Eleven dead dogs were recovered. Twenty-seven other dogs – all pit bull breeds – were counted. Some were walked out, but others were so thin and weak, the officers had to carry them to their trucks. Of the 27 live dogs, one perished at the San Jacinto Valley Animal Campus within moments of arriving, too dehydrated and weak to respond to treatment. Riverside County



Animal Services is planning to seek felony animal cruelty charges against those responsible for the blatant disregard of the dogs' health and safety. An update on this case will soon be released to the news media. One last note regarding these dogs: After we nursed the dogs back to health, several rescue groups helped provide new beginnings for them. Wags And Walks, based out of Los Angeles, took over the job of rehoming the majority of the pitties. We are grateful to Wags and Walks and all of our adoption partners and rescue group organizations that help out in these types of situations.



**AUGUST** 

## CHIHUAHUAS RESCUED FROM CREVICE

Two Chihuahuas barked and yelped from a crevice at Sycamore Canyon Wilderness Park and passersby contacted Riverside County Animal Services to assist. Officers Jennifer Selter and John Hergenreder rescued the pooches safely on a Saturday, Aug. 20, and, three weeks later, a Fontana family fell for the pair and decided to adopt them as a package deal to make sure they'd always have each other.

### **AUGUST**

# HORSE AIRLIFTED TO SAFETY

A team of rescuers saved a man's horse after it had gotten stuck in a ravine in late August on the western slopes of the Mount San Jacinto Mountains. The Aug. 29 rescue was coordinated by HART – the Horse Animal Rescue Team that includes employees from the Riverside Fire Department, Riverside County Animal Services and Riverside Police Department's mounted posse unit and volunteer members. HART also received major assistance from the Riverside County Sheriff's Department's aviation unit. Anza resident Tom Firth had been working on providing supplies to a trail-maintenance crew on the Spitler Peak Trail when Cody, his 27-year-old horse owned by an Anza man, slipped down a slope. The HART crew was activated and the horse was successfully rescued.

Here is a link to the updates published in The Press-Enterprise newspaper by reporters Anne Millerbernd and Craig Schultz (the link includes video clips provided by Riverside Fire and Animal Services):

http://www.pe.com/articles/horse-811830-canyon-morning.html



Here is a link to some still images we posted on our YouTube channel:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzQdC9v-Zv4

And here is a link to reporter Colin Atagi's horse-rescue story published in The Desert Sun: <a href="http://www.desertsun.com/story/news/2016/08/29/horse-being-rescued-near-lake-hemet/89533476/">http://www.desertsun.com/story/news/2016/08/29/horse-being-rescued-near-lake-hemet/89533476/</a>



#### **SEPTEMBER**

## **BROWNIE BEAR REUNITED**

The Sept. 6 reunion between Brownie Bear and his rightful owners was one of our stranger stories, and one of our favorite tales this year. Our press release started off with as such: A stray dog, a lost-pet flier, a cruise vacation, a thoughtful construction worker, a very kind rescue group organization and a tiny dog's reunion from Vancouver – all these moving parts added up to a strange, but happy reunions. We do reunions just about every day one of our shelters opens. But this one was unique. You see, Brownie Bear went missing Aug. 22, just as his owners were ready to leave town. The owners frantically placed fliers around the neighborhood. A day or so later, a conscientious construction worker saw the flier and contacted Brownie Bear's owners. Brownie Bear had been spotted near the site where the construction worker and his colleagues had been working. Someone contacted animal control and the dog ended up at the San Jacinto Valley Animal Campus. But by the time the construction worker and the owner connected, Brownie Bear's official hold time had expired. Brownie Bear was en route to Canada as part

of an animal rescue transport arranged by Big And Small Rescue Society, based in Vancouver. Big And Small's officials, though, were touched when they heard about Brownie Bear's heartbroken owners and the organization ended up paying for the pet's transport back to San Jacinto. Here's a super fun retelling of the story, as covered by KABC's Rob McMillan: <a href="http://abc7.com/pets/lost-pomeranian-reunited-with-menifee-family-after-detour-to-canada/1502612/">http://abc7.com/pets/lost-pomeranian-reunited-with-menifee-family-after-detour-to-canada/1502612/</a>

### **OCTOBER**

# RAZOR WIRE TABBY CAT REUNITED WITH OWNER

A tabby found dangling from razor wire outside an east Riverside business was finally reunited with his owner on Oct. 14. The cat, a 2 -year-old orange tabby named Surrender, somehow got tangled in razor wire along a fence line of a business on Massachusetts Avenue. Passersby tried to assist, but it took a concerted effort by locals





and Officers Jennifer Selter and Mary Salazar. The officers worked on freeing the cat for about 30 minutes and did everything to ensure the cat would not sustain further injury. Ultimately, the razor wire caused a serious injury to the cat's tail, and it had to be amputated. The good news, though, is that the cat had a rightful owner, thanks to a microchip found embedded under its skin. After Surrender properly healed, he went back to owner, John.

Here is a link to a short video we produced regarding the happy reunion: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jJXdMMRm2g">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jJXdMMRm2g</a>

Here is a link to reporter Alex Groves' story published in The Press-Enterprise:

http://www.pe.com/articles/orange-813591-cat-tabby.html

### **OCTOBER**

### **SCRUFFY GOES HOME**

A Coachella Valley resident told us he had almost given up hope. More than a year had passed since his terrier mix, Scruffy, went missing. Michael Greer knew exactly how many days had passed: 371. It was on that day, on Oct. 18, he finally

reunited with his beloved pet at the Coachella Valley Animal Campus in Thousand Palms. As we have shared in the past, we do hundreds and hundreds of reunions each year. But Mr. Greer's tearful reunion resonated with our desert shelter employees. And Mr. Greer was not an inactive owner when his dog got loose

from his then-residence near the Bermuda Dunes Country Club. The staff at the golf course became participants in his hunt for the long-lost Scruffy. And Mr. Greer visited the Coachella Valley Animal Campus no fewer than eight times during his ordeal. The October reunion will remain a lasting memory for our staff for years to come.

**HONORABLE MENTION**: Our San Jacinto Valley Animal Campusbased officers impounded an emu from the Aguanga area, southeast of Hemet. Although the incident happened in late December LAST YEAR, we



had already put out our 2015 Stories of the Year list and, so, we felt it was worthy of a mention this year. Plus, how often do we impound emus? Like, never. And any top-stories lists should always try to include a story about an emu. It's a fun animal name to say. Yes?



