

New look, new trucks, new skills for Gallup Animal Protection

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
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Gallup-McKinley County Animal Protection is sporting a new look with a new logo, some long-awaited new trucks and new training that will help with prosecuting animal abuse cases.

The new logo is a circle seal that reads Gallup-McKinley Animal Protection over a stylized paw logo with embedded pets, and the words Investigate*Protect*Educate.

"I love it. I just got my truck back today with it on and it looks really nice," Animal Protection Manager Tiffany Hubbard said late last week. "We wanted to get a fresh logo that was a more positive outlook and with a much cleaner look to it to represent the city and the county."

The new logo will appear first on trucks and paperwork, and soon on uniforms once new patches are made. It replaces one that still said METRO on it, a vestige of years ago when the city and county had separate animal control forces.

The new trucks – two in hand and three more on the way – have been on the wish list for years, but only found funding in the last several years that were then followed by supply chain issues that kept them out of reach, Hubbard added.

These are the first new trucks the department has had in about a decade. Over that time the fleet has consisted mostly of refitted hand-me-downs from other law enforcement departments. The newest of those is a 2011 model.

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“I have one right now, poor thing she is on her last legs,” Hubbard said, describing her oldest truck, a 2004 GMC. “We run them until they are almost dead.”

The image refresh also reflects how the role of animal control officers has changed over the years. Officers are often called upon to take animals out of abusive or neglectful situations. Emotions run high and that can be dangerous.

The department’s four officers are at varying stages of a three-module investigative training course called Code 3, which teaches investigative techniques like evidence collection, photography, interviewing, bite case investigation and courtroom testimony, all to make stronger animal cruelty cases that will stick.

They also learn critical people skills like de-escalation, situational awareness and stress management. Hubbard said there’s a strong link between animal abuse and domestic violence. A home with one of those problems is often a home with both.

“Sometimes it’s us [spotting it] first because animal abuse is a strong indicator that there is domestic violence or other abuse [in the home]”, Hubbard said.

More often, police call animal officers to remove animals from homes where they have already intervened in a domestic incident.

“Taking someone’s animal away, people are very passionate about their animals,” Hubbard said. “The good thing about that, if we are ever in those [domestic violence] situations, it’s always with the police anyway.”

Hubbard said it’s frustrating for animal protection officers that courts often allow people convicted of animal cruelty to self-report for their jail sentences, and many never show up.

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“We do our side of it. We are grateful when we get a conviction, but once it’s past a conviction, we’ve done our part,” Hubbard said.

At the end of the Code 3 training, officers will be certified as Animal Cruelty Investigators. But make no mistake, they’ll still pick up dangerous animals and strays as space allows.

The department’s biggest problem right now is just too many animals, Hubbard said.

“That explosion of puppies and feral cats and kittens is because when COVID stopped spay and neuter services, nothing got fixed for three or four months,” Hubbard said. “Now we’re dealing with the repercussions of that.”

Add to that a statewide shortage of veterinarians, pet owners dumping pets as pandemic benefits end and inflation increases and slowing adoptions and transports, and the result is overcrowding. With more than 35% of McKinley County residents receiving SNAP benefits, Hubbard fears the benefit reduction hitting this month will mean more people who can’t afford to feed their pets.

Hubbard said the best things the public can do to help the situation is to spay and neuter their pets and to support animal protection laws.

“The public can push for better protection for animals, in the form of stronger laws,” Hubbard said. “The stronger our laws are, the more efficiently we are going to be able to do our jobs.”

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