

# Animal warden patrols Hamden's wild kingdom; If it's got four legs, it's Jean Murray's business

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Jean Murray smiled softly as she took the baby doe into her arms. "No, no, it's OK," she said, caressing the doe's spotted neck when the frail **animal** began to fidget.

Murray placed the doe in an outdoor cage to eat grass and enjoy the warm summer morning at the town's **shelter** before bringing the doe back inside for some well-needed rest.

"This is the good part of the job, being able to save an **animal's** life," she said.

Murray has been **Hamden's animal** control officer for 23 years. More than just a dog catcher, she has become the town's leading **animal** advocate, rescuer, and often, an **animal's** last hope.

"She is a true protector of animals, a true, true **animal** lover," said Police Chief Robert Nolan, her boss.

At 73, Murray shows no signs of slowing down. She responds to as many as 20 calls each day, often works late and remains on-call for emergencies 24 hours a day.

"The lady has more energy than I do," Nolan said. "If she tries to retire, we won't let her. We'll turn her down."

Murray has no plans to retire.

"I feel I'm capable of doing it," she said. "I enjoy the animals. I enjoy the good parts (of the job). When the time comes when I can't handle it, I'll turn it over to someone else."

Murray applied for the job shortly after her husband, the late Tom Murray, was laid off. Murray said she always loved animals and would bring stray dogs and cats to the **shelter**.

She received one day's training because the previous **animal** control officer was leaving.

"The rest I learned from doing it every day," she said.

In 2001, the state awarded Murray its "**Animal** Law Enforcement Officer of the Year" award for her "outstanding commitment and dedication."

State **animal** control officer Barbara Godejohn said she nominated Murray after watching her climb through a window of a house after the woman inside had passed out. A neighbor had called to complain about the woman's barking dog.

"The dog was kind of nasty," Godejohn said. "I said, 'I'm younger than you. I'll climb through.' But she knew the dog and went right in. That's Jean."

## THE DOG WHISPERER

Murray investigates every complaint about stray, abandoned and dead animals. She writes down information left on her voice mail, and with a pack of Virginia Slims and a box of dog biscuits at her side, she drives out to the problem in her police department van.

Most calls turn out to be false alarms. One dog that was abandoned at a vacant home was nowhere to be found when Murray arrived. She left a note for a man whose dog bit another dog to find out if the dog had its rabies shots. (It did).

Another complaint about an unleashed dog was unfounded. The owner said his dog greets the mail carrier at the road but never leaves the yard. While Murray was talking to him, the dog did not roam, and she gave the dog a biscuit.

"Sometimes I think I'm a pacifier," she said. "I have to hear both sides of the story. You have to hold your cool when dealing with people. You can't lose your temper."

Murray's most dreaded task is putting down unwanted animals. She budgets about \$3,000 a month to board strays at Merryfield Hospital for Animals, which the town has used as a **shelter** for decades.

"We don't do it unless we have a lot (of animals) here and no one claims them," she said. "The nasty dogs I won't adopt out. I don't want to see children get bitten."

Despite Murray's petite frame and gentle demeanor, there are few dogs that she can't handle.

"She has a way of talking to dogs like no one else does. The nastiest dogs love her. It must be the English accent," Godejohn said.

Murray was born and raised in central England. She met Tom Murray, a U.S. Army soldier stationed in England, and was married at age 18. "I was one of those Army G.I. war brides," she said.

Murray lives in the same house where she and Tom raised their three children. Over the years, she also raised a shepherd husky, a Doberman pinscher and a cat. She now has two German shepherds, "Smoky" and "Bear."

"Pets offer lots of love and company. You sit and talk to them like human beings. They're great companions," she said.

## A BETTER TOMORROW

Murray's favorite companion at the **shelter** is the baby doe.

She found the doe, severely dehydrated and near death, off Wintergreen Avenue June 28. Murray named it "Winter," and thinks its mother was killed on the Wilbur Cross Parkway.

Murray and the employees at Merryfield nursed the doe back to health. Soon she will go to a farm in northern Connecticut for full rehabilitation and be released into the woods.

"We'll let her grow up and hope some jerk doesn't shoot her in the woods," Murray said.

After Murray put the doe back inside the **shelter**, she was greeted by Nancy Faughnan and her bushy black wolfhound "Alex," who dropped by for a visit. Alex rubbed his head against Murray's leg and she gave him a biscuit, which

he munched happily.

Murray took Alex from a neglectful owner eight years ago when the dog was two years old and gave him to Faughnan.

"He was eating from garbage cans. You could see his ribs," she said.

Alex, now 10, is "75 pounds of couch potato," Faughnan said with a smile. She credits Murray for saving his life.

"I think he would've probably been put down if it wasn't for Jean," she said. "He had broken ribs. A broken leg. She refused to give him back. I think she's great. Absolutely great."

Last year, Murray found a home for "O.T.," the aging dog that was forced out of the Public Work garage in part because the town's insurance company deemed the 13-year-old pooch a liability.

Mayor Carl Amento at the time had said he entrusted O.T. to Murray because he knew she would find him a good home.

Murray still keeps in touch with O.T.'s new owner, a Hamden woman who wishes to remain anonymous. O.T. had a cancerous tumor removed from his body last week, and Murray said he's recovering well.

Murray likes to keep in touch with the people she entrusts with animals.

"I like to see how the dog is doing. Some people come back and say they wouldn't trade their dog or cat for anything. One woman made photo album for me. It makes me feel great," she said.

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