

Animal control officer retires

Newspaper February 24, 2007 | New Haven Register (CT)

Author: Ann DeMatteo; Assistant Metro Editor | Page: B4 | Section: Local News

663 Words

HAMDEN She's stared down a ball python, captured horses and has been kissed on the cheek by a fawn.

It was all in a day's work for Jean Murray, the town's longtime **animal** control officer, who retired last week.

Murray, almost 78, had to end her career because of Lyme disease. Otherwise, she'd still be working. "I've been an **animal** lover ever since I was a child," she said, adding that she believes the connection between humans and their pets is very strong. "People think animals don't have emotions, but they do. If you're sick, your **animal** knows it," she said.

Murray worked for the town for 47 years, first as a crossing guard. She became the **animal** control officer in 1979.

"It's an achievement to be proud of. Forty-seven years. It makes her an institution," Police Chief Thomas J. Wydra said.

"From the day I met her, I found her to be such a quaint, loving, compassionate woman and over the five years I've worked with her, she became a very good friend of mine, like a mother to me. I could never have learned from anybody better," said Assistant **Animal** Control Officer Gina Cahill.

"I'll remember her love of animals. She wasn't afraid of anything. When fierce dogs would scare some, she would walk up to it and talk to it and feed it and the **animal** would come around," Mayor Craig B. Henrici said. "The town will miss her." Until three years ago, Murray's office was at the Merryfield **Animal** Hospital.

When rent became too high, the **animal** control officer was transferred to another town building while **Hamden**'s strays were housed at the North Haven **animal shelter**. Murray said she would have liked to stay on the job until an **animal shelter** was built in **Hamden**. Plans are in the works, and the Happy Tails Foundation has raised about \$4, 500 for **shelter** programs so far, said Dolores Giannini, a founder.

Giannini has known Murray for yearsp/and said she's in "total amaz ement" by the work she's done. "We didn't realiz e the gem we had. I don't think there's an adjective for it," because animals under her care got the best, she said.

When a Wintergreen Avenue farmer called her a few years ago because a fawn appeared to be dying near his greenhouse, Murray brought it to Merryfield, where it was treated intravenously. "Within an hour it lifted its head up. It used to suck on my cheek. I had it for a week until a rehabilitator took it," she recalled.

She'll never forget the day she "was bleeding all over the place" when she was bitten by a ferocious stray dog that wouldn't let a man out of his house near Woodin Street. She said she couldn't get near the dog herself, and it wasn't even reacting to tranquili z ers that were put in food. "I started to pick up the cans of food and he got me real good in my arm. I called police and fire and the dog tried to bite a firefighter. It attacked two cops and the cops shot it."

On another occasion, Murray saw a 7-foot ball python coming out of a window on Goodrich Street when the snake's owner was not home. She finally got the snake out of the house and put it in a trash barrel. "He was a monster."

An incident that still brings tears to her eyes was the time a cat, having just been treated at Merryfield, jumped out its owner's car window upon leaving the veterinarian. About a month later, she heard of a sick cat that was brought into the hospital. The owner was called and she walked into the room where the cat was being treated.

"She called the cat by name. The cat lifted its head, saw her and died. He waited until he saw her and went," Murray said through tears.

Caption:

"One thi Mara Lavitt/Register

Hamden's animal control officer for 27 years, Jean Murray, left, at her retirement party at the **Hamden** Police Department with North Haven **Animal** Control Officer Dave Carney, center, and **Hamden** Mayor Craig B. Henrici.