WHO WE ARE

The SPCA Serving Erie County’s Investigations Department is comprised of nine New York State certified Peace Officers, six of whom are full-time Animal Cruelty Investigators. There is also one dispatcher. **Officers work days, nights, and weekends to ensure the safety of the animals in Erie County, and are on-call during holidays in case of emergencies.**

As first responders for animals, SPCA officers protect and defend the rights of animals, in addition to rescuing both pets and wildlife in need. **The industry of animal welfare often includes very difficult and heart-wrenching situations which require the officers, who are often passionate about animals, to set aside their emotions in order to complete their task.** Each officer is trained to handle more than 130 species of animals including domestic, wildlife, farm, and exotic animals.

Last fiscal year, the Investigations Department responded to 3,429 calls for service, seized 283 animals, and rescued 854 domestic animals and 875 wild animals.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Many SPCA officers come from an education background concentrated on animal welfare, but hands-on experience is invaluable when dealing with both pets and owners. In order to...
MISSION

At the SPCA Serving Erie County, our mission is to create a more humane community through education; rescuing, protecting, and enhancing the lives of animals; and nurturing the bond between animals and people.

OUR DEDICATED SUPPORTERS!

The SPCA could not do our work without the help of our community.

Some of our generous donors just happen to be our youngest citizens, and we’d like to thank the special kids who recently helped the SPCA! Hayley held basket raffles at family parties, the Girls on the Run club from Cloverbank Elementary made pet first aid kits, and instead of birthday gifts for themselves, Ryleigh and Caylee asked for donations for the SPCA!

The SPCA was one of 15 organizations to receive a generous $5,000 gift from BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York’s Blue Crew Red Stocking Fund!

Stony Brook Shines for Others, a neighborhood holiday lights display fundraiser, raised an astounding $21,000 for the SPCA’s Paws for Love program!

Thank you to our friends at LKQ Buffalo, who again selected the SPCA as the beneficiary of their basket raffle held at the annual Cavalcade of Cars event!

Thanks to The Home Depot Thruway Plaza, Cheektowaga, and store manager Johnny! They generously donated 50 large storage containers that are currently being put to use in the shelter!
MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO,
GARY WILLOUGHBY II

Animal rescue and cruelty investigations are at the very core of who we are at the SPCA Serving Erie County. For our first several decades of existence, animal adoptions were not a focus at all. Large working animals were everywhere in our society: pulling our wagons through town, delivering our goods, carrying the fire department to that four-alarm fire, and pulling large boats along the Erie Canal as our country expanded westward.

In these early years, there was much resistance to investigating cruelty. Animals were private property and no one wanted to be told to rest their horse or take better care of any animal they owned. Early leaders in the field like Richard Martin of Ireland, one of the founders of the Royal SPCA in England, and Henry Bergh, founder of the ASPCA, were publicly criticized and threatened just for being a voice to animals in need.

In 1867 when the SPCA was founded, the landscape was similar. One extreme example occurred in 1873, when we reached out to help local citizens form what is now Lollypop Farms in Rochester. Our cruelty agent was shot at by a critic of the animal welfare movement and although he was spared, the same couldn’t be said for the hat he was wearing, when the bullet went right through it.

More than 150 years later, the job these men and women do for the SPCA Serving Erie County can still be dangerous and is as vital to our success as it was back then. Today’s agents deal with people who have complex mental health issues, coordinate with a variety of other law enforcement and social service agencies, and are expected to be thorough in their investigations, from the first received call to the end of a tough court case. They must have compassion and an ability to communicate to people of all education and economic backgrounds in a professional way.

They must safely handle large numbers of animals, some injured or scared. Some animals are unsocial like those that have never left a hoarding home or a dog that has never lived inside. Our agents enter condemned properties to rescue abandoned animals looking for a hiding place. They deal with injured wild animals as well.

These officers travel in the toughest neighborhoods, dealing often with people who don’t want to see them and do so in a respectful and professional manner. Without your support, this critical work wouldn’t be possible. Thank you for the role you play in allowing us to have these animal heroes as part of our team.

GARY WILLOUGHBY II,
President & CEO
safely handle dangerous animals, officers must be proficient in proper restraint equipment including snare poles and nets. Officers are not only trained on the animal aspect of the job, but must also recertify in handcuffing, baton use, OC spray, and firearms annually. Additionally, many officers certify in courses including crisis intervention training, wildlife capture and transport, opioid overdose prevention, active shooter, use of force, and deadly physical force.

RESCUE
On any given day, animals may find themselves in precarious situations, resulting in the need for human intervention by SPCA officers. These situations can range anywhere from needing a helping hand out of a dumpster, to requiring rescue from life-threatening situations. While responding to troubled situations, officers never know what species to expect or what potentially dangerous situation may arise. Officers are quick-thinking and well-versed in the safe handling and restraint of the many species of animals that may be encountered. Officers working with wildlife may be exposed to zoonotic diseases that are not routinely considered by primary care physicians when diagnosing an officer should he or she fall ill.

HOW INVESTIGATIONS BEGIN
The SPCA Serving Erie County relies heavily on community policing to obtain information on potential animal cruelty happening in the community. When a complainant comes forward, the dispatcher will triage the call to gather information that may be pertinent in an investigation. The dispatcher will then generate a case for an officer to respond to as promptly as possible.

Investigations may be resolved by educating animal owners on responsible ownership or summoning a suspect to court. SPCA officers enforce Article 26 of the Agriculture and Markets Law of New York State which covers crimes against animals. If animal(s) are legally removed from a property to get the care they need, the intake process may be time-consuming. Officers are trained and knowledgeable in performing a thorough investigation which may include crime scene evidence collection, crime scene photography or videography, preparing appropriate legal documentation such as search warrants, interviews and interrogations, and assisting with necropsies.

DOG FIGHTING
Dog fighting is a very prevalent and heinous criminal activity happening within our community. Dog fighting is often very organized yet “underground” which makes detection difficult and investigations very time-consuming for SPCA officers. The crime of dog fighting is defined as owning, possessing, keeping, and/or training dogs with the intent to engage in an exhibition of fighting the dog with another dog for amusement or gain. Often the dogs are used as a source of
income, whether it’s from the fight itself, or breeding/selling the dogs.

In addition to the animal cruelty and illegal gambling occurring at a dog fight, individuals associated with dog fighting are often connected with illegal drugs, illegal weapons, prostitution, gang activity, and interpersonal violence. Many times, when money is involved, close relatives or loved ones turn a blind eye or sometimes even help with the dog fighting activities. The children of people involved in dog fighting activities are often desensitized to this horrific crime from an early age.

If you suspect dog fighting activities, you can make an anonymous tip by calling 716-875-7360 ext. 214.

HOARDING
Animal hoarding occurs when an individual keeps an atypical number of animals, resulting in poor living conditions. Often, animal hoarders have an intense emotional attachment to the animals they’ve collected. They have strong feelings and believe they have rescued the animal from a poor life. Due to the emotional attachment, these individuals are generally in denial of their inability to provide a minimum standard of care including nutrition, veterinary care, and sanitary shelter. This multifaceted issue incorporates mental health, animal welfare, and public safety concerns. The collection of animals may create a situation which generates enormous stress and financial burden on animal welfare organizations.

The SPCA handles each hoarding situation on a case-by-case basis, which may include a broad range of species from cats and dogs to exotics or farm animals. The animals in hoarding situations are often unsocial and difficult to handle, posing a potential threat to the safety of officers. Additionally, the living conditions create health risks, and in order to minimize the risk of airborne illness or infestation of parasitic pests, SPCA officers will enter these homes wearing hazmat suits, boot covers, or masks.

If you know someone who may be in a hoarding situation, please call 716-875-7360, ext. 214.

FINAL THOUGHTS
People possess strong emotions regarding the care and treatment of their pets, especially when they recognize that the animals may be taken from them. In order to maximize positive results, SPCA officers have strong interpersonal communication skills to deal efficiently with exceedingly emotional individuals. Similarly, with other law enforcement careers, it is important to recognize that SPCA officers are placed in inherently dangerous situations, and for safety purposes each officer is equipped with a range of protective tools, such as a ballistic vest, handcuffs, OC spray, a baton, and a firearm. SPCA Officers must be constantly aware of their surroundings and must be able to reprioritize at a moment’s notice. Officers must utilize their training to be certain they are always using best practice techniques to handle all situations in a safe yet efficient manner. They are constantly improving on their skills, not just from their own training or experience, but from each other as well.

The SPCA asks the members of our community that if you see something, to say something. The SPCA’s dispatch phone number is 716-875-7360, ext. 214. SPCA officers will respond to anonymous tips of animal crimes.
In 2018 the SPCA’s Foster Care Department placed 2,722 animals into foster care. Many were too young to be adopted. Some were nursing moms. Some were orphaned. Some were ill. And some had behavior challenges that required a specific level of behavior modification that could only be done outside of the shelter. No matter the case, our dedicated foster volunteers stepped in to help the animals!

Starting in the 1980s, Judy Perkowski and her family fostered cats and kittens long before there was even a Foster Care Department! Judy estimates they have fostered hundreds of cats and kittens during their tenure. Recently, she had her basement re-done to accommodate her foster animals. Now that’s dedication!

SPCA: Why do you foster cats and kittens?

JUDY: When I retired, I knew I wanted to volunteer at the SPCA and to foster momma cats and their babies. I had done it in the late 1980’s with the kids and it gave us all such great joy to watch the momma cats be able to relax and be in a home environment to raise their kittens and to watch the kittens grow up.

I started volunteering in 2012 at the front desk of the SPCA but fostering was always a goal. I made it a point to introduce myself to the Foster Care Department staff and offer my services as a foster for moms and kittens. It didn’t take long to get my first litter that spring!

At the end of the season I was sad to think I would have to wait until next spring to have kittens again, but a few days later I was in the foster care office lamenting how long it would be, when an employee pointed to four tiny kittens who were three weeks old and eating on their own. He asked if I would take them.

SPCA: You’ve become known as one of our tried and true bottle baby foster moms. Tell us what it’s like to foster bottle babies.

JUDY: Bottle babies are a special privilege. They come from difficult circumstances and have special needs. They are so small and vulnerable and need a lot of TLC and patience.

A day with bottle babies begins in the wee hours of the morning with feeding and potty. Depending on their age, they need to be fed every 3 - 4 hours around the clock. They need to be stimulated to urinate and defecate, so that is the first order of business.

LEAVE A LEGACY OF COMPASSION

Let your love of animals become your legacy and help sustain the operations of the SPCA for years to come by including the SPCA in your estate plans.
Then there is feeding either by syringe or bottle. It takes about half an hour for them to eat because they sip a bit and need a break to burp. After they finish eating, they need to be cleaned at both ends. Then the bottles and nipples need to be washed and put away, the warming disk needs to be warmed in the microwave and replaced, and the carrier they live in needs to be cleaned.

Then we all go back to bed until 5 a.m. or 6 a.m. when we do it all over again and make formula for the next 24 hours. There is usually play time and cuddle time in there also. When the kittens are back to sleep, the rest of the family eats breakfast and our dogs go out for their walks.

Our pets are used to having kittens and have learned to be gentle with them. We go about our day until the next feeding, potty time, and play time. As the kittens grow, they need to learn to use the litter box at about 3 - 4 weeks old. They learn to eat on their own at about 4 - 5 weeks. We have rarely had bottle babies who didn’t need medication. They are very young and vulnerable but get better quickly.

JUDY: It’s very easy to have a momma cat and her kittens. She does all the work and all I do is put down food, clean litter, and play with all of them. I have a finished basement where they stay. I usually spend an hour in the morning with them, another hour and a half in the afternoon, and time in the evening playing and enjoying them all in my lap and napping. Really, this is the best time of my day!

JUDY: It is one of the most rewarding and loving things you can do. It may sound like a cliché, but you are improving the quality of lives and making a difference by giving them a chance to be in a home environment. You will be hooked after your first litter.

Honestly, I can’t imagine why anyone wouldn’t want to do this. There is nothing else that comes close to watching these little ones grow up and giving the momma cat a safe place to be and a chance to raise her family with people who love them.

JUDY: Joy, unconditional love, making a difference in these animals’ lives until they can find their forever homes. Is it sad when they leave, but then the next litter arrives and we start all over again!

If you are interested in learning more about becoming a foster parent (for dogs/puppies, cats/kittens, rabbits, guinea pigs, reptiles, etc.), please call the SPCA’s Foster Care Department at 716-875-7360 ext. 216. We would love to have you!

A bequest is one of the easiest and most impactful ways to support the SPCA’s mission. Planning giving options include:

- Wills
- Trusts
- Charitable gift annuities
- Life insurance policies
- Real estate and personal property
- Retirement benefits

For more information, visit YourSPCA.org/donate/planned-giving, or contact Jennifer Gurz, Chief Development Officer, at 716-875-7360 ext. 219 or jenniferg@yourspca.org.
MEMORABLE RESCUE STORIES
Firsthand stories from SPCA Officers

STORY FROM
OFFICER AARON KANDEFER

Often the Animal Rescue and Animal Cruelty Investigations teams find themselves in precarious and interesting situations. Typically, from mid-April through early June, officers assist with Canada Goose and duck nests that are laid in enclosed school/business/private court yards, roof tops, and balconies. Rescue is needed to help the newly hatched offspring. It’s not surprising these animals choose these sites because it gives them protection from both predators and the weather. The problem arises that once the eggs hatch, it’s several weeks before the baby birds can take flight and leave the protections their parents sought. Without our intervention, the young will not be able to survive as they do not have a food or a water source available to them.

In this photo, Jennifer Maleskis and Chelsa Morehouse-Wlodarczyk (in the background) are helping to move 13 ducklings and their parents from a school courtyard to a safer spot. There is nothing more enjoyable than reuniting parents and their young, and to see the incredible bond these animals have with their offspring and the drive to protect them!!

STORY FROM
OFFICER LINDSEY STYBORSKI

I’ve been an officer for 13 years, but one of my favorite rescue stories happened just this past January. The Depew Fire Department called asking for our assistance retrieving a bird from a tall light post in a parking lot. The bird had been there for several days.

When I got there, I realized it was a herring gull who must have slipped and wedged himself in between the light posts. With the help of the fire department, I was in a bucket truck and was lifted to the bird. I was able to wiggle him free from where he was stuck, and I safely brought him down in the bucket with me. I brought him back to the Wildlife Department where they assessed him. He had a hole in a chest and on both of his wings. They were able to fix him up and he was released a few days later!