

## Animal Control

“The grand jury returned two indictments against [Michael] Vick: that he ‘engaged in or promoted’ dog fighting and that he inflicted ‘inhumane injury or pain upon certain companion animals ... by beating, killing or causing said dogs to fight other dogs’” (Mihoces A1). Animal fighting is a malicious and sadistic act of cruelty that Humane Societies across the nation deal with, and investigations have shown that it is a growing problem in America. While humane societies throughout our country respond to extreme cases like Vick’s, most humane societies provide help for animals in less extreme circumstances and with much less publicity. One such clinic, the Coulee Region Humane Society in Onalaska, provides help to animals in need through its animal control programs. In its efforts to prevent animal cruelty, the organization dares to dream, dares to make a difference, and dares to succeed.

### Dare to Dream

For many years, organizations like the Coulee Region Humane Society (CRHS) have dared to dream about preventing animal cruelty. The CRHS is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization, originally operated out of a garage, and founded by Carol Schneider Phillips and a group of volunteers in 1971 (Schmid). In fact, prior to the formation of the CRHS, the movement for the prevention of cruelty to animals began shortly after the Civil War, and numerous organizations were formed (Beers 154). The first of record was the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) founded by Henry Bergh in 1868. At the close of Bergh’s first Society meeting, he stated “The blood-red hand of cruelty shall no longer torture dumb beasts with impunity” (qtd. In Beers 2).

The CRHS and many other animal rights groups were modeled after Henry Bergh’s organization, and the CRHS has grown in its efforts to make a difference in animal welfare. Over the last thirty-six years, the CRHS has outgrown the garage and several other facilities, and in 2001 plans for construction of a new animal shelter were in place. The La Crosse Tribune reported in the fall of 2001 that the CRHS was lacking \$900,000 for the new animal shelter, which was estimated at \$2.7 million. With the help of area philanthropists, the remaining funds were raised enabling construction to begin during the fall of 2002. The late Beverly Fitz from Lansing, Iowa, donated \$290,000, CenturyTel \$25,000, and Dave Skogen \$15,000, and he stated “As a member of that community, we have an obligation to give...It’s not a choice” (qtd. in Mercer).

Although the CRHS is primarily a self-sufficient non-profit organization, it does receive some government funding for one particular program. The animal control division is that program receiving financial aid from the local municipality and the La Crosse County government (Schmid). Unfortunately, the rest of the CRHS must rely on donations and fundraising. Thankfully, local businesses like Quillin’s and Festival Foods have pledged one percent of all sales receipts collected by the CRHS (Coulee). In addition, the CRHS has an online store with over 650 magazines to choose from, with up to eighty-five percent off the cover price. When people buy or renew a magazine subscription through their online store, the CRHS receives forty percent of the proceeds (Coulee). Several other fund raising campaigns are held by the CRHS in an effort to support their cause, which can be found on the CRHS’s website. With the financial support of local municipalities, county government, and philanthropists, the CRHS is able to make a difference by providing for the needs of animals.

### Dare To Make a Difference

When visitors take a walk through the CRHS, they quickly realize the need and importance of this organization. So many animals have been subjected to abuse, from their owners and or the environment, and are in desperate need of rescue and medical care. Without the CRHS, these animals would suffer unjust and agonizing deaths. As of date, there have been no reported acts of animal fighting to the

Coulee Region Humane Society, or a single documented case in the Court in La Crosse or Onalaska (Schmid). However, The Humane Society's Executive Director Heather Schmid, informed me that she believes it does in fact exist in our area. The CRHS has rescued pit bulls with scar tissue consistent with dog bites, and in one specific case a pit bull had its ears cut off with a pair of kitchen shears believed to have been done in preparation for a dog fight (Schmid).

Despite the fact that there have been no cases discovered in La Crosse or Onalaska, dog fighting does exist in Wisconsin. The Associated Press reported two cases this year in Madison and Green Bay. In Madison, Dane County Humane Society president Cathy Holmes said that they took custody of forty-seven pit bulls, believed to have been trained for fighting, which has cost them over \$200,000 to care for the dogs since June of 2006 ("Dane"). Cathy Holmes stated "Based on the evidence previously presented, it would be our belief there was dog fighting going on at one point and time" (Dane). Furthermore, a veterinarian for the Dane County Humane Society determined that thirty-two of the forty-seven dogs "were involved in or trained for dog fighting," in light of the "scars, puncture wounds, broken teeth, severe skin trauma and injuries caused by other canine teeth" ("Dane").

In Green Bay, sheriffs responded to a complaint of animals left in a basement and garage without food or water (Judge). The resident of the home, Kendale Smith, was charged with three felony counts of training dogs to fight and one misdemeanor count of failure to provide food and water for a confined animal (Judge). The Fox Valley Humane Association's Tawana Hanamann testified before the Court "that she had to euthanize Smith's dogs...She said the dogs were too aggressive and she was concerned about the safety of the shelter staff" (Judge).

The topic of animals being euthanized receives considerable criticism from the community, but unfortunately is a fact of life within most humane societies. CRHS manager Mary Vinson, said "there is a place for it in all types of agencies that find new homes for critters" (qtd. In Mercer). In 2002, CRHS euthanized 1260 animals, of which 744 of those euthanized were undomesticated, unhealthy, or vicious, and not available for adoption (Mercer). The difference between the CRHS and *no kill* shelters is that the CRHS will never turn an animal away "[accepting] anything and everything" said Vinson. *No kill* shelters turn away animals when they are at their capacity or critters "they can't get rid of," said Vinson. Although euthanizing animals is a controversial subject, the CRHS deems it appropriate for their continued successes.

### **Dare to Succeed**

With the help of their new facility, the CRHS has achieved many successes. CRHS's Executive Director Heather Schmid, believes that their biggest success to date came when the CRHS maintained control over its animal control division. This time last year, "the La Crosse Police Department proposed to the city council that the department take over animal control services performed by the Coulee Region Humane Society for the last 30 years," (Schmid).

Police Chief Edward Kondracki suggested to the city council that "shifting [animal control] to police civilian service employees" currently operated by CRHS would save the city \$100,000 a year (Kent). Schmid argued that Kondracki's proposal was "flawed," and if the city council conducted a "thorough [cost] analysis" they would see that they would be spending considerably more money with civilian contractors (Schmid). Ultimately the city council agreed, and the CRHS maintained its animal control division (Schmid). Schmid also noted as a success, that pet adoption at the CRHS had increased by forty percent since last year (Schmid). Another success not directly related to CRHS, but one that will ultimately affect it, is recognized by the \$2.5 million donated by Leslie Alexander to the National Humane Society "[which will]...boost the group's legal capabilities to fight against animal cruelty" (Beatty W2). Such a donation helps animal rights activists lobby lawmakers to enact stiffer penalties to prevent animal cruelty. One lawmaker, Neil Cohen, inflamed by the Vick case, is already seeking increased penalties and had stated "I had no idea how prevalent this was..." and "This just makes me sick" (Koch 1a).

In conclusion, the CRHS's objective of daring to dream, daring to make a difference, and daring to succeed is being realized. The founding members of CRHS would be proud to see that what they had started in a garage grew into a multimillion dollar complex, with the capability of providing shelter and emergency medical care twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week to critters. Thanks to the help of philanthropists and funding from local and county governments, the CRHS has been provided the fuel necessary to make a difference.

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