

# Making Responsibility Something to Brag About

## Dog licensing takes a turn for the cool

People brag about their expensive cars and their high-paying jobs; people brag about their honor students and about their tennis games. Until recently, very few would have bragged about licensing their dogs.

A marketing campaign in New England has changed that. People in Maine are now boasting about performing a basic, boring, and often-forgotten civic duty—and instead of being annoyed by the bragging, others are following suit.

How did this peculiar turn of events come to pass?

Licensing dogs falls off the radar for a lot of pet owners. No one plans to lose their dog, and so, many pet owners reason, the worst that can happen is a minimal fine. Getting people to take the time and pay the money, when the consequences for not doing so seem minimal, is often a tough sell.

But in 2003, Norma Worley, the new director of the Maine department of agriculture's

animal welfare program, came up with a solution: Let people know where the money spent on dog licenses actually goes.

"One of the things I found out when I came on is that the animal welfare program in Maine is funded about 90 percent by dog licensing," says Worley.

The license fees pay the salaries for all of Maine's cruelty investigators, but their connection to the animal welfare fund hadn't been made apparent to taxpayers. "I didn't really feel that people understood that; they saw the dog license as another tax—[thinking] that it went into the black hole general fund," says Worley.



After developing colorful posters and bumper stickers to help spread the message, Worley appeared on local news and talk shows to promote the connection between licensing and funding to combat animal cruelty. At the same time, she raised the licensing fees from \$4 for altered animals and \$6 for unaltered animals to \$6 and \$10, respectively; she also stipulated that a dollar from each sale would go to the low-income spay/neuter component of the animal welfare fund.

The marketing campaign worked: licensing rates have jumped by about 10 percent and the program has reeled in around \$600,000 that will directly help animals across the state.

Most people were astonished to learn that the money goes right back into animal welfare, says Worley, and many are bragging about their contribution by proudly displaying the bumper stickers that say, "I helped fight animal abuse in Maine! I licensed my dog!"

"I wasn't sure how the bumper stickers would go over, so we sent a bunch over to the town clerk's office. They were always calling us and asking us to send more," says Worley. "And I've seen them all over the state." —CA

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