



**People Power**  
BY CARRIE ALLAN

# Jorge Esmieu

**Hearing the call:** Jorge Esmieu has come a long way, baby. Having started as a worker in the mowing and bulk pickup crew in Gaithersburg, Md., back in 1995, Esmieu soon took on extra part-time work as a park observer. Part of that job included handling after-hours animal control calls for the city—work he enjoyed so much that, when a position with the city’s animal control department opened up, Esmieu applied.

He was quickly promoted to animal control officer, and in 2007, he was the city of Gaithersburg’s nominee for a statewide award recognizing outstanding service by a municipal government employee.

**The secret of his success:** He loves his job. Every day is different, he says—some days he’ll be checking to make sure a dog left outside has water to drink, and others he’ll be helping relocate a Canada goose who’s made a nest in the courtyard of a local high school. That enjoyment and his positive attitude infuse many aspects of his work. “He has a lot of patience, with people especially. With animals, too, but with people ... 90 percent of our job is education,” says Lisa Holland, director of animal control for the city.

The award nomination form that the city submitted in 2007 says plenty about Esmieu’s skill and attitude: “Jorge’s personnel file is filled with thank you notes and other testimonials in appreciation of a job well done. Helping to locate a lost dog, rescuing ducklings stuck in a storm drain, saving goslings stranded on a busy highway, responding to and resolving a complaint about a barking dog, removing a dead snake, even rescuing a cat from a tree are just a few of the many heroic achievements for which Jorge has been commended—because he is indeed a hero to those he has helped.”

How could the folks at the Maryland Municipal League resist such a commendation? They didn’t: Esmieu won the award, becoming Maryland’s Municipal Employee of the Year.

**A long and winding road:** Esmieu didn’t start out in Maryland. In fact, he didn’t even start out in the U.S. He emigrated from Guatemala in his late teens, and went to high school in Miami before coming north.

In the country where he started out, he says, his current job doesn’t even exist. “In Guatemala, we don’t have that kind of animal control,” says Esmieu. “If you go to any Latin American country, you see dogs running all over the place. ... I wish we could have in Guatemala someone taking care of the animals, but it’s just different. It’s a very different place.”

**There may be no animal control** in Guatemala, but that doesn’t mean there are no animal lovers. Esmieu was one of them, starting at a very young age. As a child, he says, he had a dog he loved and took care of for eight years. The dog eventually died, and he’s never really gotten over it.

“I don’t have any dogs now,” he says. “I told my wife—she and my kids want a dog—I told my wife, ‘I don’t think any dog is going to replace my first dog.’” His three kids are keeping after him about it, though, and Esmieu’s trying to play humane educator at home. “I try to explain to my kids a dog is not like property, is not like a car. A dog needs attention, and we are so busy all the time!”

# Dog Park

