

People Power BY KATINA ANTONIADES



Kimberly Roy

A department of one: Until recently, Kimberly Roy wasn't just an officer with Northport, Alabama's animal control department—she *was* the department. In September 2006, Roy became the city's first and only ACO.

She was destined to work with animals from a young age. Born in horse country—Louisville, Ky.—Roy says her first word was "horse." Having worked as a horse trainer, pet sitter, and kennel attendant at Jefferson County Animal Control and Protection (now Metro Animal Services), Roy brought years of animal experience to her new position. She continues to learn through the National Animal Control Association's training academy and hopes to become a cruelty investigator. And she now has some help on the job: This year, Northport hired another ACO.

Getting to know you: Roy makes it a priority to connect with her community by giving talks to groups like the Lions Club and the local 4-H club. "Every chance I get, I'm doing public speaking," she says. This year, Roy aims to expand her outreach to schools; she envisions a "Be Kind to Animals" poster contest at the elemen-

tary school, a middle-school blanket drive for shelter animals, and a high school essay contest that will allow the winner to shadow her on the job for a day. Roy has also presented a talk on animal control functions to local police, which she says helped her earn the officers' respect.

Come on and take a free ride: City residents aren't used to having an animal control officer around to enforce leash laws and other ordinances, so Roy uses an approach she calls "free ride home." The first time she picks up a dog, if she's able to get in touch with his owner and verify his rabies vaccination, she'll take him home without penalizing the owner. If she finds him roaming again, she'll take him to the shelter. (Her department contracts with the Metro Animal Shelter in Tuscaloosa.) The policy has helped her build rapport with local pet owners, she says.

Cleaning house: One of Roy's favorite cases involved a couple who had 12 pit bulls in their backyard. The dogs had plywood-and-metal doghouses, the water bowls were breeding mosquitoes, and the backyard was full of clutter—including several old appliances. But, says Roy, "I could tell they loved these dogs—they

didn't really mean for these kinds of conditions to happen. ... You could tell that the family really was [in] a lot of turmoil." She asked the man how many dogs he could realistically care for, and he said he could keep two. He agreed to get them vet care and better housing within a week, and he relinquished the others.

He kept his word—and he didn't stop there. When Roy returned, the appliances were gone, and in their place was a patio table with an umbrella and four chairs. The space had become "a beautiful backyard," says Roy. "[His wife] came out and hugged me and thanked me, because they'd lived there for 12 years and they'd never had coffee on the back porch."

Size doesn't matter: She's faced aggressive dogs, a 300-pound pig, and a five-foot-long rattlesnake—and so far, she's avoided injury. It might come as a surprise, then, that Roy stands about 4'11". But her animal smarts help her avoid becoming lunch for the dangerous animals she encounters. When a chow mix who had just bitten two people approached Roy and jumped on her, putting his paws on her shoulders and growling, she kept calm and remained still. Later, she says, a police officer told her, "Wow, I don't know if I could have stood there and done what you did."

Making the connection: As Northport's first ACO, Roy's enjoyed a warm welcome from the city—probably because she makes it a point to help both humans and animals. In addition to education and enforcement, she says, "This job is about compassion. And not only for the animals, but for the people, because the people sometimes don't realize what's going on. Sometimes it just takes asking a few questions, and then you can see the light go on—'Oh yeah! Yeah, if we do this—oh!' " She likes helping the community's residents. "Knowledge is something you have to pass on," she says. "If you keep it, it's not worth having, because you're not sharing it."