

Saving Animals—Including Those on Two Legs

Humane law enforcement officer rescues man after car accident

BY KATINA ANTONIADES

As the senior humane law enforcement officer at the Washington Humane Society (WHS), Chris Schindler had already helped thousands of animals. He'd climbed a fire-department ladder to rescue a neglected Akita mix from a sixth-floor balcony in the pouring rain. He'd tirelessly pursued a report of a man beating a dog in the street, tracking down the heroin-laden abuser and rescuing his victim.

Those and many other lifesaving efforts earned Schindler an Animal Services Award from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments in March. But the life he saved on a Wednesday afternoon last summer was of the two-legged variety—and we're not talking about a bird.

On July 25, Schindler was driving in Silver Spring, Md., when a van next to his truck swerved and almost hit him.

Schindler swerved to avoid the vehicle, running his truck up onto the curb. From that perspective, Schindler saw something worse: Another van spun 360 degrees, hit a car, and crashed into a tree on the median, pulling it out of the ground. That van—its front doors and sliding door smashed by the collision—then caught fire.

As the driver struggled in his seat, Schindler surmised that the damaged doors were preventing his escape, and he went to help. "It was just, I guess, instinctual," he says. Schindler calmed the man, who unhooked his seatbelt so Schindler could pull him out of the van feet first.

Another man helped carry the driver, whose leg bone was exposed, to Schindler's truck. "He was kind of out of it—he had some blood coming from his

nose and mouth, but he seemed like he had minor injuries compared to what could have happened," says Schindler. The driver managed to find humor in the situation, telling his helpers, "Thanks for the lift," but he became disoriented and anxious, wanting to go back to his van to get his cell phone.

It was a good thing he couldn't walk back to retrieve it: Moments after the rescue, the van exploded in flames, fueled by propane tanks inside. No one was hurt—traffic had stopped by that point, and lines of 30 to 40 cars extended down the street, their drivers calling 911 and taking pictures with their cell phones.

What they weren't doing was helping. "This one woman—I was running over [to the van] and she was like, 'Somebody help him!' but she didn't come over, and nobody else did until after I had already pulled him out," he says. "Sometimes people just think, 'Oh, somebody else will do it,' but ... time was definitely a factor ... because it wasn't too long after that that his whole van was gone."

After speaking with police, who arrived with firefighters about 20 minutes later, Schindler (who still had seven hours of his shift to go) left the scene to return a dog waiting in his truck to her family. A red chow named Sugar who'd been housed at WHS while her family found a new place to live, the dog had woken her people up with her barking one night, saving them from a fire. AS

Chris Schindler will continue his heroism at The HSUS, where he was recently hired as the new Deputy Manager of Animal Fighting Law Enforcement.



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