



## La Crosse County Humane Officer Wins New Professional Award

**Release Date:** November 8, 2012

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MADISON – Humane Officer Susan Gabrilka of Onalaska received the new Humane Officer of the Year Award from Secretary Ben Brancel of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) earlier today. Gabrilka, who is the first to receive the award, serves as the appointed humane officer for all of La Crosse County.

“We had a number of nominations submitted for this award, but one rose to the top for all of the judges and we couldn't be more pleased with our choice, Amiie. Your name will always be at the top of the list of those that received this award,” Brancel said as he presented the award to Gabrilka at the Coulee Region Humane Society in the company of her colleagues, friends and family. Also in attendance was Yvonne Bellay, DVM, Animal Welfare Program Manager/Epidemiologist for the DATCP Division of Animal Health and creator of the award program.

Tireless, compassionate, devoted, and resourceful are just some of the words used to describe Gabrilka throughout her nomination, which was submitted by her colleagues at the Coulee Region Humane Society and the County of La Crosse. Her nomination tells stories about a handful of the many selfless acts she has undertaken over her 35 year career.

One story tells of how Gabrilka rescued three dogs and five cats found in a locked car on a 100 degree day. The owner was en route to Arizona in her non-air-conditioned compact car to start a new job. Gabrilka found a donated rooftop carrier for the woman's belongings as well as three carriers for the dogs. She also installed the rooftop carrier in 103 degree heat and convinced the owner to surrender her cats for adoption. Another story tells of how Gabrilka personally delivers dog food daily to a financially strapped woman struggling to feed her much-loved dog.

“These stories speak to Susan's absolute devotion to animals and their owners,” Bellay says. “It's no wonder that her fellow humane officers contact her '24/7, twenty times a shift' if needed for advice on how to best do their work.”

Bellay hopes the award will help elevate the understanding of what humane officers do and how they benefit their communities.

Having a trained humane officer like Gabrilka on staff has many benefits, not the least of which is that they are specifically trained to investigate animal-related cases. This specialized training leads to a greater chance of successfully prosecuting animal abusers.

Currently, 46 of Wisconsin's 72 counties benefit from the services of a humane officer. The department's goal is to have 100 percent of counties served by at least one trained humane officer.

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