

Denver's Animal Advocate



Photo by John Leyba, Denver Post

Diane Balkin

*Chief Deputy District Attorney
City of Denver*

By Jennifer M. Brauns

Recently, Mile High Dog had the privilege of visiting with Denver's Chief Deputy District Attorney, Diane Balkin. Balkin is a national authority on animal abuse and cruelty and works tirelessly to prosecute those who would harm people and animals. She has been instrumental in bringing about changes in Colorado's animal abuse and animal cruelty laws to ensure that more perpetrators are caught and prosecuted. She constantly sends a message that animal cruelty will not be tolerated.

Balkin has been with the District Attorney's office since 1979 and has been advocating for people and animals for thirty years. When asked if there was a particular event that sparked her passion for animals, she shared, "It began with a love of animals and having been brought up in an environment with parents that taught me to care for every creature."

Although she has been involved with all types of cases during her career, there was a particular animal cruelty case that she read about back in 2000 that really set her cause into motion. A local radio station disc jockey had orchestrated a contest that ultimately led to a chicken being thrown off the roof of a building.

"It really offended me that a person who is setting an example for listeners could promote something that was cruel and attach a prize to it. It was gratuitous violence and it struck me that it was minimized because the animal involved was a chicken. Would it have been okay to throw a puppy off the roof? If not, then why was it okay to throw a chicken from a roof? I drew the line," she shared.

Since that time, Diane has remained passionately involved at the local, state and national level by educating prosecutors, veterinarian's offices, police and various law enforcement officials, animal shelter employees and others about how to report, investigate and prosecute animal cruelty and abuse cases. She sits on the Board of the International Veterinary Forensic Sciences Association and is also a member of the Colorado State Board of Veterinary Medicine.

Much has changed for the better in Colorado since Diane prosecuted her first animal cruelty case. In 2002, it became a felony offense rather than a misdemeanor to abuse an animal and in 2007, Colorado became the sixth state

to make it mandatory for veterinarians to report suspected animal abuse. While we have come a long way, it's just the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

There is an extremely high percentage of co-occurrence of animal and human abuse. In a violent household, a child who witnesses cruelty to animals or humans may become desensitized and later become abusive themselves. "I'm all about prevention," Diane told us.

Last year, Diane was awarded the 2008 ASPCA National Humane Award as the Outstanding Law Enforcement Officer of the Year. Her determination has not only had an impact at the state level, but at the national level as well. As challenging as it must be to deal with these types of cases, Diane finds the work to be very rewarding.

We commend Diane for her diligent efforts and wish her continued success in bringing about changes that benefit the welfare of people and animals.

If you are interested in having Diane speak to your class, staff or other group, please contact her at 303-884-2200 or send an e-mail to dxb@denverda.org.