

News

April 7, 2017

The ASPCA Honors Law Enforcement Individuals with Annual "Champion for Animals" Award



Chief Humane Agent Kerry Manion, ASPCA's Vice President of Field Investigations and Response Tim Rickey, Major Case Agent Elysse Rathbone and Rachel D.K. Finney Executive Director of Capital Area Humane Society.

Today, the ASPCA announced the recipients of our second annual "Champion for Animals" award, honoring individuals who have shown dedication to ending dog fighting in their communities. The announcement comes just before [National Dog Fighting Awareness Day \(https://www.aspca.org/gettough-campaign\)](https://www.aspca.org/gettough-campaign) on April 8, a day created to highlight the brutality and pervasiveness of dog fighting in America.

This year, the honored recipients are:

Major Case Agent Elysse Rathbone with the Capital Area Humane Society for her 15-month investigation of a dog fighting ring in Columbus, Ohio. Working closely with the Columbus Division of Police Gang Unit, Agent Rathbone conducted an investigation that culminated in the removal of 45 dogs and the arrest of five men on felony dog fighting charges in April 2016. She continues to work with the ASPCA on other animal fighting cases in the Columbus area.



ASPCA's Vice President of Field Investigations and Response Tim Rickey with Major Case Agent Elysse Rathbone.

Detective Paul Girskis and Special Federal Officer Timothy R. Muehler with the Rock Island Police Department for their investigation of a dog fighting ring spanning the Illinois and the Iowa Quad Cities area. Detective Girskis and Special Federal Officer Muehler worked in coordination with the Federal Bureau of Investigation to rescue 64 dogs from multiple properties in April 2016. They eventually arrested 10 men, who were indicted on animal-related charges in January this year.

Special Agent Samantha Maxwell with the Federal Bureau of Investigation for her integral role in the investigation of the Quad Cities dog fighting case in coordination with the Rock Island Police Department. Special Agent Maxwell utilized advanced investigative techniques over the course of more than 18 months to collect evidence and secure search warrants. She continues to make animal cruelty cases a priority in her work.

"Dog fighting is an underground activity that's difficult to investigate and often goes overlooked," said Stacy Wolf, Senior Vice President of the ASPCA's Anti-Cruelty Group. "The individuals being recognized today know the brutality of dog fighting and have shown tireless commitment to ending the suffering of these exploited dogs. Our hope is that law enforcement nationwide will follow in their footsteps and make dog fighting investigations a priority."

According to an ASPCA poll, half of law enforcement officers nationwide say they encounter dog fighting in their line of work, but only 23% said that their department has the necessary resources and training to effectively investigate dog fighting cases in their community.

Since 2010, the ASPCA has worked with law enforcement on more than 100 dog fighting cases. Over the past few years, we have conducted training workshops across the country to provide the resources to support local law enforcement agencies in addressing this crime. Despite being a felony in all 50 states, dog fighting continues to be a popular underground activity,

and the ASPCA estimates that there are tens of thousands of dogfighters in the United States.

To kick off National Dog Fighting Awareness Day, the ASPCA partnered with legendary actor Sir Patrick Stewart to spotlight the prevalence of dog fighting and encourage animal lovers nationwide to take action and #GetTough on dog fighting by snapping a [muscle flexing selfie](https://www.aspc.org/muscle-selfie) (<https://www.aspc.org/muscle-selfie>).



150th Anniversary: Join the ASPCA

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