Many people consider the term "Animal Control" an attempt to glorify the role of dog catcher. However, the role of the animal control officer has materially changed in the past several years due to the problems with human/animal relationships that exist in every community.

The new animal control officer is a far cry from the old lasso-throwing, net-tossing, pistol-packing cast-off from the police department. The "new breed" of animal control officer has become a professional.

Many cities and counties have set up their animal control programs as separate departments, and more are seeing the wisdom of such a designation so that the program can take its rightful place along with other public services. The public pound is gradually being replaced by a more modern and more efficiently operated animal control center.

Even after the establishment of an up-dated facility, however, there is always a need for a general awareness of the problems of animal handling and destruction.

Hence the importance of the animal control officer and his or her role in the community public health and safety. The duty of the officer is to assist in the enforcement of the animal control ordinances, but along with this should be a desire to help resolve the problems that are created by an unaware animal owning public or an irresponsible animal owner.

Applicants should be prepared to study and work hard to achieve a degree of professionalism so that they can function in an efficient manner and be proud of themselves and earn the respect of the citizens.

The animal control officer must be able to learn and understand the local ordinances as well as enforce them with efficiency and consideration for the humans and animals involved. There is also the need for a working knowledge of state and federal laws.

A general knowledge of animals and identification of breeds, kinds and species is important, especially those animals that are more commonly involved in domestic ownership or custodianship.

There should be an ability to understand directives and to carry them out in an efficient manner. There is need for the officer to be able to write legibly and to complete the forms and reports so they are readable and understandable. Many departments now have radio communications so the officer should have an ability to speak clearly and to comprehend communications from this source.

The officer must be able to drive a vehicle and pass any driving or safety test. The vehicle assigned to the officer brings with it a double responsibility, not only to obey the traffic laws but to realize that live cargo is being carried.

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One of the biggest problems facing the animal control officer is that of maintaining good public relations. A compassionate feeling for those humans and animals in distress is essential.

Probably one of the most difficult duties that an animal control officer will have is that of destroying an animal. The taking of life cannot be regarded lightly no matter how many times the necessity arises. Careful instructions must be prepared and followed as to when an animal must or should be destroyed and the manner in which the act is completed. Applicable laws should be known and understood.

Approximately 55% of the community will be animal owners, and their animals are part of their families. It is easy to stir up human emotions when a family pet is involved. The manner of handling the case, the diplomacy and efficiency involved, can make the difference between cooperation and a lump on the head for the officer.

Thus, with training in all the areas mentioned, good appearance and a spirit of helpfulness, the animal control officer can be a great asset to any community.

How much does it cost to own an average-size pet in your community?

The Council on Pet Education in central New York has put these figures together and is publicizing them to encourage potential pet owners to think twice about the investment necessary with a pet.

The information is on a simple typed sheet and lists the costs for dogs and cats in the categories of food, vaccinations, worming treatments, spay/neuter and licensing.

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Two groups teaching their communities

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For samples of the pet cost information sheet, write Eileen McShane, Rt. 5, RD 4, Box 294, Canastota, N.Y. 13032.