

# ANIMAL CRUELTY TASK FORCE

## NEWSLETTER



### DEXTER'S LAW TAKES EFFECT IN FLORIDA

Like many, if not all dogs that find themselves homeless and in an animal shelter, Dexter had less than an ideal start.

The four-year-old Bulldog mix was being sheltered at Pinellas County Animal Services when Domingo R. Rodriguez arrived in May of 2024 to adopt him.

Days later...four days to be precise...Dexter's decapitated body was found floating near the mangroves in Fort Desoto Park. Dexter had been wrapped in a plastic bag and discarded.

In February of 2025, Domingo Rodriguez was found guilty of Aggravated Animal Cruelty. He was also found guilty for the unlawful disposal of the canine.

Lee County, Florida, has an existing Animal Abuse Registry, established in 2023, available to animal shelters, rescues and the general public. Any individual convicted of animal abuse will find their name on this very public list. Animal shelters, rescues and those seeking to rehome their pet(s) are implored to review the list prior to transferring ownership to another individual.

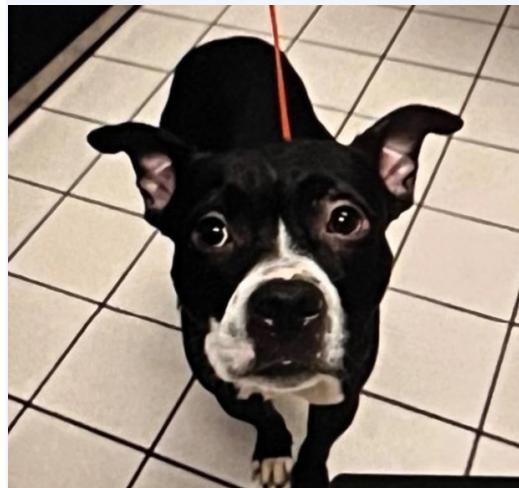
"Dexter's Law," effective January 1, 2026, now requires a statewide database containing the names of those convicted of felony and/or misdemeanor animal abuse. The list also includes those who have entered a plea of

**JANUARY 2026**

**(Dexter...continued)**

guilty or nolo contendere.

Additionally, Dexter's Law (HB 255) adds a new "multiplier," called "Aggravated Animal Abuse," to the



Florida Criminal Punishment Code used to compute sentencing lengths. The Lee County Sheriff's Office Animal Cruelty Task

Force couldn't be more pleased and appreciative for this legislation and for the work initiated by State Senator Thomas Leek from District Seven.

FOLLOW THE LEE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE ANIMAL CRUELTY TASK FORCE ON FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM



JOIN THE  
LEE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE  
AND  
SHY WOLF SANCTUARY  
FOR A FREE AND ENLIGHTENING  
"LUNCH & LEARN"

LEARN ABOUT THE LIFESAVING WORK DONE BY THE SANCTUARY, THEIR RESCUE EFFORTS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PROTECTING THESE AMAZING ANIMALS.

WHERE: LEE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE  
COMMUNITY OUTREACH CENTER AT MIROMAR OUTLETS  
10801 CORKSCREW ROAD  
SUITE 190, ESTERO

WHEN: THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2026  
11:30 AM TO 1:00 PM

IMPORTANT! REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED!  
EMAIL GARY LEVINE AT  
GLEVINE@SHERIFFLEFLORG  
TO REGISTER.



LUNCH GENEROUSLY PROVIDED BY FORD'S GARAGE MIROMAR OUTLETS



OUR LOCAL ANIMAL SHELTERS AND RESCUES ARE ALWAYS IN NEED OF THE FOLLOWING SUPPLIES:



Towels (cloth and paper), wet and dry dog and cat food (unopened), blankets, washcloths, disinfectant, disinfectant wipes, trash bags (13 gallon and 55 gallon), mops, buckets, squeegees, bleach, sponges, scrub pads, laundry detergent, Dawn dishwashing liquid, brooms and dustpans, dog and cat toys (especially toys for "heavy chewers"), six-foot leashes (non-retractable), collars, harnesses, potty pads, dog and cat treats (unopened, no rawhide products, please), puppy/kitten replacement milk, clumping cat litter, litter boxes, pet-grooming supplies, large Non-nylon chew bones (Augie Bones and BetterBone, for example), Kong toys, Isopropyl alcohol, Hydrogen peroxide, garden hoses and spray nozzles, baby bottles with 0-3 month nipples, pet crates (any size), nail clippers, stainless steel food and water bowls, cat scratch pads, cat towers, latex and non-latex gloves, Earth Rated® Dog Waste Bags, distilled water, glass cleaner and pet beds.



Please drop off donated supplies at the Lee County Sheriff's Office Miromar Community Outreach Center located in Suite 190 in the Miromar Outlets (10801 Corkscrew Road, Estero.)

### PREVENTING ANIMAL SUFFOCATION

Back in August, canine rescuers in York County, Pennsylvania, spotted a dog struggling with a cheese-ball container stuck on her head.



Running through dense cornfields made finding the dog difficult to capture and help.

With the assistance of Dallas Fuhrman of Nighthawk Drone Services, rescuers located and detained the dog at 3:00 am. In an effort to show appreciation for his assistance, the dog was later named "Dallas" after the drone pilot.

We have posted numerous pleas, over the years, regarding plastic bags...especially potato chip/pretzel bags, as they have caused many canine deaths when the animal is unable to free himself from the bag.

This plastic container serves to remind us of similar dangers posed by jars, jugs and bottles.

Please...ensure that all such containers and bags are safely discarded. Whenever possible, please tear open both ends of plastic bags and be careful when discarding plastic containers. Even smaller containers are a hazard as they have the potential to trap wildlife.

## SMELLING THE PASSAGE OF TIME

You can smell freshly baked pizza. You can smell smoke from a distant fire.

But can you "smell time?"

Interestingly, your dog can...well, sort of.

Canines are amazingly capable of monitoring the passage of time by recognizing the gradual fading of smells and scents in their environment.

For instance, your dog has a definitive recognition of your scent and the level of the scent when you are present in the room.

He additionally comprehends that your scent dissipates with the passage of time.

Each day, prior to your return home from work or school, he can recognize the level of your scent that remains. He observed the slow, but steady, dissipation of your scent molecules throughout the day and now, it has diminished to a level at which you ordinarily return.

While it is believed that canines can additionally sense the passage of time by the sun's movements, shadows and consistent sounds, they depend heavily on their "olfactory clock," made up of approximately 300 million scent receptors, to predict recurring events in their homes.



## SCAM ALERT!

The Lee County Sheriff's Office Animal Cruelty Task Force received information indicating that a number of owners of lost/missing pets have been fraudulently contacted and told that their pet has been found.

The scammer(s) had the technology required to make it appear as if they were calling from one of our local animal shelters.

They indicated that there was a fee that needed to be paid prior to being reunified with their pet. The fee was \$1,500 and it needed to be paid through an online payment app.

Be careful when posting about a missing pet.

Here, in Lee County, LCDAS sponsors a "Find My Pet Portal." Many other locations have similar sites.

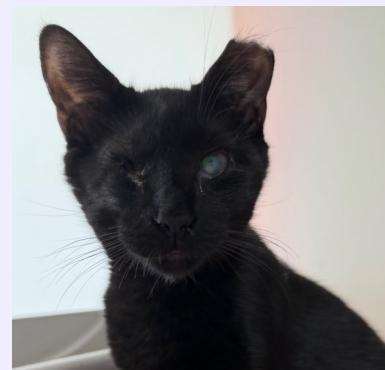
**PLEASE DO NOT TRANSFER PAYMENT TO A CALLER INDICATING THAT THEY HAVE YOUR MISSING PET!**

## MEET "STEVE"

This eight-month-old cutie has had a rough start and we are committed to ensuring that his life is filled with love and security.

Steve arrived at Gulf Coast Humane Society dealing with an upper respiratory infection and a severe eye infection in his right eye...which he subsequently lost.

Reportedly, Steve loves human company and will be at your side more often than not. We love this trait in cats as so many of them are aloof...



If you can provide a safe and loving home for this furry fella, please visit the shelter at 2010 Arcadia Street in Fort Myers or call 239-332-0364.

Dr. Megan Davis, DVM

Suburban Animal Hospital

Canine Infectious Respiratory Disease Complex (CIRDC) is more commonly known as kennel cough. The newer terminology reflects that a large group of bacteria and viruses can cause illness in our dogs and they are often infected with more than one organism at a time. Common culprits include Bordetella, Mycoplasma, Pneumovirus, Canine Influenza, Canine Distemper and Parainfluenza.

Pneumovirus is one CIRDC agent that the news outlets like to talk about in association with outbreaks. Often these stories are associated with shelter and rescue groups as these are the people more likely to be running extensive respiratory panels to determine the cause of contagious coughing.

For the average privately owned coughing dog, your local veterinarian is unlikely to jump to recommending an expensive PCR test as by the time results come back (3+ days) the dog is usually getting over their symptoms. We start to consider this testing if they're not responding to our usual treatments or they have severe illness.

Vets see CIRDC year-round but it does tend to follow similar trends to human flu and the common cold with outbreaks more common in the winter months. Locally we see many "snowbirds" and their dogs returning at this time of year and this can contribute to the introduction of new strains of viruses that are more common in other areas of the country.

Pneumovirus may be significant as it appears to be highly contagious and infection with this organism can be associated with a longer duration of clinical signs and/or more severe symptoms. Most of the times symptoms are mild, including sneezing, watery eyes, runny nose and coughing. However, it can lead to Pneumonia in severe cases.

Puppies, geriatric dogs and Brachycephalic breeds (ex. Frenchies) are mostly likely to be severely affected. These patients may require more aggressive treatments, which may include hospitalization, intravenous fluid therapy, oxygen support, nebulization and Coupage.

The incubation period (time from exposure to showing symptoms) of Pneumovirus is believed to be less than a week. The virus can be transmitted before a dog shows symptoms and there is no vaccine available. These things can make it more likely to reach "outbreak" levels.



Many dogs with respiratory infections have a history of recent contact with other dogs in a social setting. This could include boarding, day care, grooming or dog parks. However, this is not required as we ourselves can often act as fomites and introduce infection into the household on our shoes or clothing.

The good news is Pneumovirus is easily killed by most disinfectants, handwashing with soap and water, normal laundering of clothing and washing bowls and toys. These are good preventive steps to take if you or your dog were exposed to a coughing dog.

Pneumovirus is something you should be aware of but not something you should panic about! If your coughing dog is lethargic, not eating or having difficulty breathing then seek veterinary care. If they are coughing but otherwise acting normally then keeping them home for a few days and monitoring is reasonable.

# SPEAK UP

# FOR THE VOICELESS



Khaleesi was rescued in Cape Coral after suffering horrific neglect at her former owners hands. She was severely malnourished and couldn't even stand. Today, she is healed and in a loving home. Her former owners were jailed on felony charges. One call made all the difference.

## SWFL CRIME STOPPERS



## STOP DOG FIGHTING AND ANIMAL CRUELTY NOW!

CALL CRIME STOPPERS AT  
**1-800-780-TIPS**  
**(8477)**

TO PROTECT ANIMALS WHO  
CANNOT PROTECT THEMSELVES.

Paid by **CSTF**

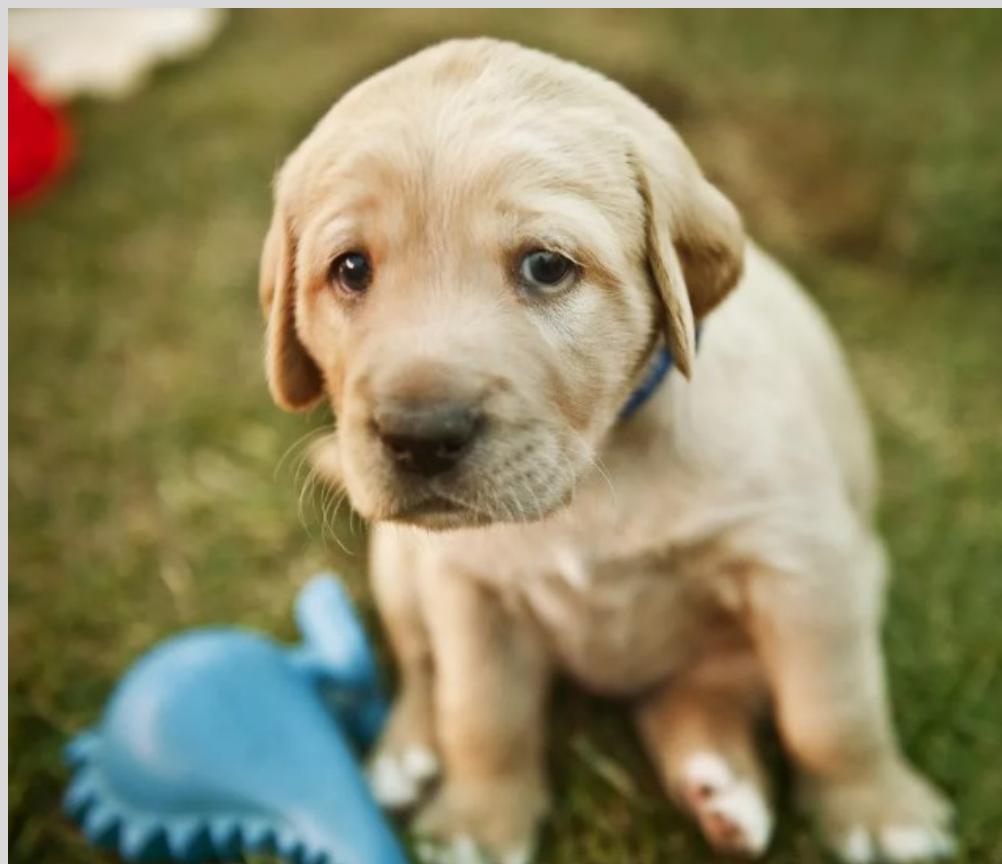
## IS YOUR PET IN PAIN?

Dr. Sharon Powell  
Edison Park Animal Hospital

Dogs and cats can be good at hiding their pain. Since animals can't verbally tell us when they are in pain it is our responsibility as pet owners to pay attention to subtle changes in our furry companion's physical condition, behavior or mobility that might give us a clue that they aren't feeling well.

One of the first indicators that your pet may be in pain is a noticeable change in their behavior. This change may include reduced activity, not being as eager to exercise or play, walking slower or refusing to walk, reluctance to jump or use stairs, trouble lying down or getting up, and of course limping. Other behavior changes that may suggest your pet is in pain would be vocalization such as whining, whimpering or yelping. Behavior changes such as becoming aggressive, snapping or growling can also indicate pain especially when touched. If your pet becomes restless, this may indicate they are unable to rest comfortably because of pain. And some cats and dogs may choose to hide or isolate themselves

and become anti-social. Cats in particular may stop grooming themselves so their coat will look unkempt.



Watch the way your pet moves and stands. Standing with a rigid posture with the head down and reluctance to move can indicate a back or neck problem. Often the tail will be tucked under. Your dog may twitch or have tense muscles if they're experiencing muscle or nerve related pain or painful abdominal spasms.

Changes in eating and drinking habits maybe observed in painful pets with a loss of appetite or reluctance to move to get to their food and water bowls. Or refusing food for instance with teeth, jaw or

oral pain. Excessive licking or drooling, increased heart rate and breathing rate and panting particularly when at rest can sometimes be an indication of pain.

Pain in pets, can be caused by a variety of conditions including injury, trauma, or an underlying issue like arthritis. Pain can be acute (something that just happened) or chronic (like arthritis, dental problems). Some signs of pain can vary widely ranging from blatantly obvious to incredibly subtle. If you see any signs that may indicate your pet is in pain, it is important to seek prompt veterinary attention. Some injuries causing pain can be totally cured if the cause is addressed quickly. Your animal companion depends on your care and loving attention.