

### Atchison Co Sheriff Receives National Rescue Honor

(KAIR)--A first for Kansas comes in the form of a prestigious honor for the Atchison County Sheriff's Department, awarded the Humane Law Enforcement award for 2013, which honors outstanding prosecutors, law enforcement and policy makers who have made a significant difference for animals in regard to illegal animal cruelty or wildlife crimes.

The award comes in recognition of the work the Atchison County Sheriff's Department did when it was discovered last year that wild animals, including a tiger, bobcats and mountain lions, were being kept caged, in what has been called deplorable and dangerous conditions, on the property of Matt Baker, located near 262nd and Neosho Road. Midge Grinstead, Kansas State Director for the Humane Society of the United States, says the department's unyielding efforts to save the animals earned them the honor. "To me they went above and beyond, did everything in their power to make things right. We've never had someone from Kansas, and we've had some great folks, but they just were wonderful, and what they did was wonderful, and I'm so proud."

Undersheriff Joe Butner helped lead the investigation, which began in March, and ended with the early May seizure, and rescue, of the animals. "I hadn't seen anything like that up close. I didn't know what to do, didn't know what we were going to do, I didn't know how we were going to solve it. But what we did know was those animals were in need of help, they were in need of being rescued and taken to place that they could be cared for properly. And that was our focus from the very first minute visiting that place."

Sheriff Jack Laurie says the successful seizure came as he and Butner brainstormed the best method to rescue the animals, left in cages held shut with latches that would barely contain a dog. "Joe did a lot of research into it. He exhausted all of our resources and options that he possibly could. He happened to be going to a training class put on by the HSUS and he met the Kansas representative from HSUS there."

Butner, who had hoped for such an opportunity, says it was during that meeting the partnership between Atchison County and the Humane Society of the United States fell into place. "I had taken the pictures with me to this class that we had taken of the compound. During lunch break, I introduced myself to this lady who took an immediate interest in this. We went back to class, like twenty minutes later, and she poked me in the arm and said 'come with me,' and right then and there she started making phone calls. By eight o'clock the next morning representatives of the Kansas City Zoo were here, vet techs with food, and began assessing these animals."

Proper removal of the animals followed, with the Humane Society of the United States picking up the \$30,000 price tag to do so, while overseeing the process of finding them new homes at animal sanctuaries.

Months passed, with Laurie and Butner proud of their achievement, but not expecting the national recognition awarded to them last week.

Both Sheriff and Undersheriff received a plaque of gratitude as part of the award, and have placed them on display in their individual offices. Butner's stands along side numerous photographs of the rescued animals and other memorabilia of the unique case.

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