

# ***Basic Animal Rescue Training*** **(BART)**

<http://basicanimalrescuetraining.org>

## **A Challenge Met from a Tragic Event**

Janet Olson, DVM

Charlotte Holt, R.N. EMT-P

Scott Tomek, B.A., EMT-P

### **Introduction**

Almost every time we meet firefighters and mention the Basic Animal Rescue Training program, also known as BART, we hear amazing stories of firefighters risking their lives to save animals. One retired firefighter recently told me a story of crawling through a burning barn and saving a pig. With heavy smoke and little visibility he slowly felt his way across the floor when all of a sudden he felt a wet sensation against his SCBA mask, then the fogging breath of a living creature. He was not sure who was more frightened, him or the pig. Putting themselves at risk to save an animal's life is not part of the responsibility of a firefighter. Human lives and safety always come first. However, firefighters live beyond their job descriptions. Firefighters have a fierce drive and long history of helping people and saving lives, all lives.

A tragic event for the New Brighton Fire Department led to the innovative, cutting edge, Basic Animal Rescue Training program. The New Brighton FD was paged to a house fire, adrenaline quickly turned to anxiety as many of the firefighters realized the address they were responding to was one of their own. As the firefighters were searching for possible victims in the home, they came across Bart, a thirteen year-old German, Shorthaired Pointer dog. He was suffering from extensive smoke inhalation and unresponsive. He was quickly, but gently removed from the smoke-filled residence. The firefighters were unable to resuscitate Bart. Dr. Olson's husband a firefighter with the New Brighton Fire Department who was involved with the resuscitation attempt returned home that day despondent. He, along with the rest of the department was devastated. Not only did their friend lose his house, but he also lost his best friend, Bart.

Bart died that day. However, through this tragic loss, a vision was born, a vision for veterinarians to think outside of their veterinary practices, no different than emergency physicians did 35 years ago when EMS was born, a vision of firefighters prepared, confident, and equipped to deal with animal rescue and resuscitation situations. It was a vision of the public feeling secure that their pets will be respected and cared for in the event of a fire, MVA, or natural disaster - a public safety community that would be able to care for injured K9 officers and their search and rescue dogs. The Minnesota Veterinary Medical Association (MVMA) shares this vision and is committed to making it a reality. Bart, the dog, died that day, but BART, the program, the commitment to basic animal rescue training for all emergency response teams, was born.

## **What Is BART?**

**Basic Animal Rescue Training** has been designed to provide firefighters, law enforcement, and EMS personnel with not only the first responder-type skills necessary to provide basic medical care, BLS resuscitation skills, and animal rescue techniques, but also the animal specific equipment necessary to accomplish it. The two-hour training course is currently provided free to interested fire departments in Minnesota. The course provides education and hands-on skills in the areas of animal restraint and handling, patient assessment, first aid, and CPR. All groups that complete the program are given an emergency medical equipped kit with the supplies necessary to help effectively rescue, resuscitate, and support the medical needs of animals until they can be transferred to a veterinary facility for more advanced and intensive care.

## **Who is using BART and Why?**

Due to the tragic loss experienced by the New Brighton Fire Department and the pioneering efforts of Dr. Janet Olson and the MVMA, the New Brighton Fire Department began the Basic Animal Rescue Training coursework and completed it early this fall, setting the standard and raising the bar for other fire departments in Minnesota. Word spread about the new BART course; the Minneapolis Fire Department and the Woodbury Public Safety Department both learned about the basic animal rescue training program and saw the same value and benefit that the New Brighton Fire Department saw.

The Minneapolis Fire Department learned about BART through a veterinary technician named Kathy Moore, a friend of Minneapolis Fire's EMS Chief, Charlotte Holt. Ms. Moore explained that this "new and pioneering" training, designed for firefighters, would teach them techniques to safely and effectively prepare them for saving the life of our victims' pets. The realization that nearly 2/3 of all Minneapolis households own a pet and that these pets are often the owner's "best friend", solidified the need to take a closer look at basic animal rescue training for all emergency response teams. Chief Holt contacted Dr. Janet Olson, DVM (founder of BART) and Dr. Olson explained that this program was designed to first promote firefighter safety by, in the event of an emergency, providing them with the skills necessary to safely handle a scared or hurt animal, but secondly to provide them with the tools necessary to perform the rescue techniques.

The Chief of the Minneapolis Fire Department, Bonnie Bleskacek, felt this training was "in-line" with the department's mission statement, "Be Safe, Be Kind, Be Prepared," and viewed this program as a win-win situation. After all she said, "Firefighters are already making extraordinary efforts to rescue animals. By endorsing and promoting this program of training, we are going to provide them with the skills and tools necessary to perform these rescues more safely and effectively."

While the Basic Animal Rescue Training course has not yet begun for all 444 firefighters within the Minneapolis Fire Department, the comments thus far have been good. Sure there are those who

argue, “We just don’t have the extra resources necessary to save a pet,” and then you find those who remark, “We are already doing this,” and they are eager to embrace the additional knowledge in order to be more effective when they do commit the resources.

Finally, there are those who argue in favor of making every effort to save their “boy” or “girl”, claiming that if their house burned down - while that would be devastating - insurance allows them to rebuild. But the loss of a “loved one” can never be replaced. Several things we know; firefighters will do what they can to save a life. One of the many lessons learned after Hurricane Katrina is that there's a very strong human-animal bond that we must acknowledge and plan for accordingly.

During the event of an emergency, Minneapolis Fire Department’s administrative staff will leave the decision to the “on-scene” incident commander whether to commit resources to rescue animals. To facilitate this decision, Dr. Olson will provide the department with a few simple and straight-forward protocols that are considered “reasonable” efforts. In addition, Dr. Olson has also agreed to script a paragraph for the Minneapolis Emergency Communications Center (MECC), that allows dispatchers to effectively redirect animal emergencies to local veterinarians and animal hospitals offering 24/7 emergency services.

Woodbury Public Safety (WPS) heard about the BART program at the monthly Metro 911 providers sub-committee discussion on education goals, a discussion that highlights new or unique programs that might be useful for other EMS agencies. There, Chief Holt described the BART program and how the basic animal rescue training empowered her staff of firefighters. WPS decided BART was not only a worthwhile program, but also a timely one, considering the number of displaced individuals and animals that followed this year's devastating hurricanes.

WPS felt that with their rapidly growing community of families, many of whom owned pets, that if a devastating fire were to destroy a family’s home and possessions, the one thing that might make an unbearable loss bearable, would be the resuscitation and recovery of their pet. WPS arranged three training sessions with Dr. Olson, which would allow the police paramedics, the non-officer paramedics, and the fire service firefighter/EMTs, the K9 officers, and all support personnel to attend and train together. Initially, BART was met with some skepticism and the occasional joke. However, following the training, the comments were nothing but positive from the street-level providers, many of whom stated, “I always wondered what I would do if handed a pet. Now I know what to do.”

WPS is now looking at how it can incorporate BART, Basic Animal Rescue Training, into other traditional EMS, fire, and law enforcement training. Some of these areas include how to approach pets that appear to be protecting a victim or that may be aggressive due to their own injuries. Once the basics are established, real-world scenarios must be explored and experienced.

### **How Your Service Can Participate**

For more information, or to arrange Basic Animal Rescue Training for your fire department or

EMS team, please visit the BART web site at: <http://www.basicanimalrescuetraining.org> or contact Dr. Janet Olson, BART founder, by email at [janet.olson@basicanimalrescuetraining.org](mailto:janet.olson@basicanimalrescuetraining.org). Additional contact information can be found on the web site's contact page: <http://basicanimalrescuetraining.org/blog/contact-us/>

### **Conclusion**

To date, the New Brighton Fire Department, the Woodbury Public Safety department and all members of the Minneapolis Fire Department have completed the Basic Animal Rescue Training program. Minneapolis Fire has been the largest department to complete the BART program. Another 20 fire departments are scheduled for BART training during 2006. The program has significant value for fire departments across Minnesota, and all throughout the United States. Saving an animal, when possible, means a tremendous amount to the owner. The recent, devastating hurricanes that struck the gulf coast and the large number of individuals unwilling to leave without their pets, contributed to a death toll that might have been avoidable had emergency response teams had the training necessary to deal with such a situation. When EMS teams are called in to these catastrophes from all over the US, having the appropriate skills to handle an owner/pet situation become priceless. Minnesota's own fire services and emergency teams were called to help in both the Texas and Louisiana hurricanes, making the BART program a key to success, a key that every fire and emergency team should hold.

### **Bios**

Janet Olson, DVM Dr. Janet Olson established BART in 2004. She graduated from the University Of Minnesota College Of Veterinary Medicine in 1996 and completed a rotating internship in medicine and surgery in 1997 from the University Of Missouri College Of Veterinary Medicine. She has been practicing in the Twin Cities area since 1997. She is married to a member of the New Brighton Fire Department. She would like to extend a special thank you to Mark Clark and his family, her husband, Firefighter Brian Olson, Dr. Jim Winsor, past president of the MVMA, Sharon Vangsness, Executive Director of the MVMA, Deputy Chief Charlotte Holt of the Minneapolis Fire Department, and to Bart, a true hero. Without them, B.A.R.T. would not have been made possible.

Charlotte Holt, EMT-P, R.N. is the Deputy Chief of EMS for the Minneapolis Fire Department. She has been involved in EMS as a Paramedic and/or ER Nurse for 29 years.

Scott Tomek, BA, EMT-P is the Director of Staff Development (EMS) at Woodbury Public Safety and serves as a paramedic with Lakeview Hospital EMS. He has been a paramedic for over 20 years and an EMS educator for 17 years.