

PEOPLE

Shift change Officer fetches new career

By Nancy Weingartner

Kelly Strowd is willing to tolerate the occasional Lab-mix that gets away—but not the child abuser or rapist.

As an investigator for the police department for Orange County, North Carolina, Strowd regularly witnesses the seamier side of society. And unlike her flashy counterparts on TV's "Law & Order: Special Victim's Unit," her cases aren't wrapped up in an hour, minus commercials. "I can work on these cases for a year...You work hard and you know they're guilty, but nothing happens to them...its goes to court and they get a light sentence. It's frustrating," she says.

And sometimes it's disheartening. Such was a child abuse case she worked on last summer where the father was the abuser. Both she and the child testified in open court—something that's extremely difficult for a child, especially when it involves a parent—and in the end, the judge found the father not guilty. "It's hard to see the justice system fail you when you're that young," Strowd says about the child. The father is "not a nice person," Strowd remarks, and yet he's involved in a custody battle for his son.

"It makes you bitter," she admits. "My goal when I bought into Fetch! (Pet Care) is to get out of law enforcement."

When she went into police work 10 years ago, Strowd says she was a different person. Today she and her husband—also a police officer she met on the job—live on a dairy farm surrounded by family. She doesn't have children, but she does have a cat and three dachshunds she loves dearly:

Harley, her first dog as an adult; Daisy, a rescue dog; and Tiny, a foster dog she decided to adopt.

Over the years, she's found herself drawn to animals, but unfortunately, "as a police officer you don't see much positive happening to dogs."

Strowd ran across Fetch! while researching jobs in the pet industry on the Web. At first she was convinced she could do it on her own, but after learning more about the franchise, Strowd decided the company's national presence, professional materials and proprietary software were worth the royalties she'd pay each month—especially since she has to run it in her off hours from her full-time job.

He customers are pet owners who disagree with crating pets at the more traditional kennels, or who have pets that require special care, such as insulin shots. In addition, Fetch employees walk dogs, take them on "off-leash adventures," do in-home visits or overnights and provide a pet taxi to the groomer or vet.

Strowd, who currently employs 35 pet sitters, bought a second territory in August of this year. She admits that it's not easy running a second business while working full-time in another industry, especially because pet sitting requires outstanding customer service with the two-legged members of the family. "You have



Kelly Strowd hopes to make Fetch! Pet Care her day job. She's now growing her franchise while working full-time as a police investigator, much to the dismay of two of her three attention-seeking dachshunds.

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to be responsive," she explains. "People sometimes can't plan vacations until they know their pets are taken care of."

Her staff handles most of the dog walking and sitting, while she does the scheduling and reservations, but Strowd has welcomed a few dogs into her home. She has to be selective, however, because dachshunds tend to be both stub-

born and territorial. So what kind of dog would the trio welcome? "Another dachshund," she says laughing, or "a sweet lab who will let them boss it around."

In addition to canine clients, she's taken care of a ferret that liked to hide his toys under the couch, guinea pigs, even horses. "We had a request (to care) for a chicken, but they got a family member to do it," she says. After all, she does live in farm country.

And while the stress is nothing compared to that of her regular job, it does have its moments. And not just for her. A reoccurring nightmare are a pair of Lab-mixes that go "crazy over squirrels," she says. One minute the walker has the leash firmly in hand and the next minute she's frantically chasing the dogs who easily pulled free after a squirrel spotting. The employees now know the game, but not until two of them searched the neighbor-

hood for the dogs, only to return to the house to find the dogs on their porch, waiting to be let back into the house.

Strowd has given herself another year of pulling double-duty shifts. She says she was profitable within the first year, but hasn't replaced her salary as an investigator yet.

"I'm reactive now," she says. "I'm looking forward to being proactive." **[FT]**