



Animal Sheltering Operations Peer Planning Workshop

Speaker Bios

Ammy L. Gierzak, Harris County OHSEM (Ammy.Gierzak@oem.hctx.net)

Ammy Gierzak is the Homeland Security Planner for the Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HCOHSEM). She is based at Houston TranStar, home to the county's Emergency Operations Center. Ammy brings 15 years of experience in planning, emergency response, emergency management, and disaster response to meet a diverse set of challenges that can face the nation's third most populous county. Prior to her position with HCOHSEM, Ammy spent several years developing plans for Harris County Public Health Services (HCPHS) focusing on the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) Program. Ammy graduated from Central Michigan University with a Bachelor of Science degree.

Miranda Hahs, Montgomery County OHSEM (Miranda.Hahs@mctx.org)

Miranda Hahs is a Senior Homeland Security Planner with the Montgomery County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (MCOHSEM). She has been with Montgomery County for 16 years to include the last eight years with MCOHSEM. Miranda began her career as a jailer in the juvenile detention facility and after receiving her degree in Criminal Justice from Sam Houston State University, she was promoted to a probation officer and later served as the supervisor over special programs overseeing sex offender management, placement, and drug court. Since her start at MCOHSEM, Miranda has worked in the Emergency Operation Center for numerous incidents such as the Tri-County Wildfire, Planning Section Chief for the Lewis Creek Dam near breach, Ironman Texas Events, the 2016 floods, and Hurricane Harvey. Miranda has also served on the Montgomery County Animal Issues Committee since 2013 and helped coordinate animal sheltering for Hurricane Harvey. She also spearheaded the Montgomery County Animal Issues plan re-write in 2018.

Caroline Egan, Fort Bend County OEM (Caroline.Egan@fortbendcountytexas.gov)

Caroline Egan is the Disaster Recovery Manager for the Fort Bend County Office of Emergency Management (FBCOEM). Caroline served as a Houston UASI Regional Planner, but then transitioned to coordinating recovery efforts in Fort Bend County following the May/June 2016 floods, continuing with Hurricane Harvey recovery efforts. A graduate from the University of North Texas, she holds a Bachelor's degree in International Studies and a minor in Emergency Administration and Planning. Caroline brings with her non-profit and mass care experience having worked for the American Red Cross prior to her employment with the County. Caroline has learned that residents will often put their pets first when it comes to making decisions in a disaster (such as whether or not to evacuate or stay in a shelter). With her mass care experience, animal issues and animal sheltering go hand in hand with keeping all Fort Bend County residents (furry or otherwise) safe in a disaster.

Dr. Wesley Bissett, Texas A&M Veterinary Emergency Team (WBissett@cvm.tamu.edu)

Dr. Bissett is an associate professor of food animal medicine and director of the Texas A&M Veterinary Emergency Team (VET) in the Department of Veterinary Large Animal Clinical Services. He earned his D.V.M. and his Ph.D. in microbiology from Texas A&M. Before joining the faculty of the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences (CVM) in 2000, he was in private practice. Following the experiences of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on the campus and region, Dr. Bissett began to focus on disaster preparedness and response. He became a leader in the CVM's new initiative to respond to animal issues during emergencies and disasters.

In 2009, Hurricane Ike struck Texas and initiated the formation of the VET at the request of the Texas Animal Health Commission and Division of Emergency Management. Dr. Bissett has been the Director of the VET since its inception and has presided over the development of a 38-person team with assets valued in excess of \$2 million. In addition, he has led the development of the nation's first required clinical rotation in emergency preparedness and response. Dr. Bissett and his team of volunteer faculty, staff, and students have been deployed to provide aid following: the 2011 Bastrop Complex Wildfire, a 2012 Brazos Country Alzheimer's patient search, the 2013 West, Texas, fertilizer plant explosion, the 2014 response to the Dallas-Ft. Worth Ebola Outbreak, the 2015 Wimberley Floods, 2016 "Tax Day" floods in Houston, and Hurricane Harvey. The deployments have provided an exceptional educational experience for students while simultaneously serving the citizens of Texas.

Dr. Dawn Blackmar, Houston SPCA (DBlackmar@houstonspca.org)

Dr. Blackmar currently serves as the Director of Emergency Management for the Houston SPCA. She earned her DVM from Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine in 1980. Dr. Blackmar received a Certificate in Homeland Security from the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M in 2008. Before working for Houston SPCA, Dr. Blackmar served as the Director of Veterinary Public Health for Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services for 26 years. In that capacity, she was actively involved in responses to Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Ike. She was also involved in developing plans for zoonotic disease outbreaks. Dr. Blackmar is currently the chairperson for the Harris County Disaster Animal Management Committee and serves on the TVMA Disaster Preparedness Committee.

Salise Shuttlesworth J.D., Friends for Life (Director@friends4life.org)

Salise Shuttlesworth J.D., a UT-Austin law alum, founded Friends for Life, the only LEED-certified no-kill shelter in Houston in 2002. It opened its first brick-and-mortar space in 2009, but quickly outgrew its home and opened its current East 22nd Street location in 2012. In 2013, the organization teamed up with BARC, the City of Houston's animal shelter, to create Fix Houston, a public-private partnership offering free spay/neuter surgeries to underserved parts of the city. Friends for Life has introduced several other programs to the Houston community which include; Thinking Outside the Shelter, a unique concept to offer support to owners so that they can keep their animals in their homes and out of the shelter system; Running4Home, a mobile adoption van conveniently parked near the Memorial Park running trail; and Project Warm, an innovative approach to help keep feral cats warm, dry, and safe. Salise is also a proud pet parent to six cats, two dogs, and three ferrets.

Melissa M. Noriega, BakerRipley (MNoriega@bakerripley.org)

Melissa M. Noriega is Vice President for Policy & Partnerships for BakerRipley, a non-profit community development organization. She began her career at the Houston Independent School District (HISD), followed by election in 2007 as an at-large member of Houston City Council. She served as Chair of Public Safety, Chair of Infrastructure, Transportation & Technology, Co-chair of the Census Complete Count Committee, and Co-chair of the City Bond Election Campaign in 2012. Melissa volunteered at the George R. Brown after Katrina and in 2017, she was part of the BakerRipley team that stood up the shelter at NRG after Hurricane Harvey, including pet sheltering, and has been actively involved in the regional disaster recovery response since.

In 2005, Melissa spent almost a year in the Texas House of Representatives as the first person to serve under provision of an amendment to the Texas Constitution approved by voters in 2003, allowing a stand-in for a Representative or Senator deployed as part of a war effort. She served on the Defense Affairs & Homeland Security and the Corrections committees, and was named Freshman of the Year by the Democratic Caucus.

Amy Blackwelder, Montgomery County Sheriff's Office (Amy.Blackwelder@mctx.org)

Deputy Blackwelder has been with the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) since 2010. She began as a patrol officer for six years, and has been under the Livestock Division for the past two years. The county Livestock Division is currently in the beginning stages of establishing a mounted patrol unit for the Sheriff's Office and was recently deployed for the East Montgomery County Fair, which was a huge success. Deputy Blackwelder previously worked for a mounted security company for over five years. Deputy Blackwelder grew up around animals, having her own horse at the age of seven, and currently has several animals, including non-commercial livestock. She was also part of the FFA for five years, a member of the horse judging team, and has raised show livestock.

Anson Drake, Montgomery County Sheriff's Office (Anson.Drake@mctx.org)

Deputy Drake has been with Montgomery County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) since January 2007. He started his career as a jailer and later transitioned into working patrol and investigations. Currently, Deputy Drake works for the county's Livestock Division and has extensive history, knowledge, and love for livestock. He is also a member of the MCSO Mounted Unit. He was actively involved in the rescue efforts of people and livestock during Harvey for MCSO. Deputy Drake grew up around livestock his entire life, working alongside his father in their family-owned cattle and horse ranch where he learned a majority of his skills. Deputy Drake currently owns and operates Diamond A Ranch, housing cattle.

Stevee Franks, Harris County OHSEM (Stevee.Franks@oem.hctx.net)

Stevee Franks is the Recovery Specialist at the Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HCOHSEM). Currently, Franks serves as co-facilitator of the Harris County Long-Term Recovery Committee and co-chairs the Regional Recovery Workgroup. She is also the HCOHSEM representative to the Harris County Disaster Animal Management Committee. Stevee Franks earned a Master of Science in Security Studies in 2014 from Sam Houston State University, where she also earned her Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice in 2011.