



Jeff Kirland, pictured with his wife Teresa, is honored for 25 years of faithful service to the Blount County Sheriff's Office. Photo courtesy of Jeff Kirkland.

ACO Jeff Kirkland praised at retirement

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After 25 years with the Blount County Sheriff's Office, Sergeant Jeff Kirkland is taking off his badge. Most recently the county's animal control officer, Kirkland drew praise from his colleagues in law enforcement and at the animal shelter.

"He's definitely going to be missed," said Sheriff Mark Moon, citing Kirkland's reliability, work ethic, leadership, and integrity. "He was always unashamed to stand up for what he believed in," Moon said. "I respected that about him."

Karen Startley, director of the [Animal Adoption Center of Blount County](#), collaborated closely with Kirkland. "Officer Kirkland was a delight to work alongside," Startley shared. "His knowledge of law was vast and ability to resolve conflict with compassion was admirable."

As the sole animal control officer responsible for Blount County's 650 square miles, Kirkland stepped into a challenging role when he accepted the assignment two and a half years ago. "It's a tough, busy job because of the number of animals we deal with and being the only person out there," Kirkland said. "Most of the time we could keep two people busy, if the county's budget would allow that."

Kirkland said he received an average of 6-8 calls a day, including "complaints about farm animals, about dogs being tied up, dogs that run loose, or dogs without water or food." Often, the day's first call was at one county line and the next call at the opposite county line, Kirkland explained.

Moon commended Kirkland's dedication amid this demanding schedule. "He'd make sure that whatever the complaint was, he addressed it," Moon said.

Always cognizant of his charge to protect, Kirkland went out of his way to ensure the welfare of the animals in his care. Even when called to nearby areas, he brought each impounded dog to the shelter before responding to the next call, so that no dog would "struggle to breathe in the dog box," Kirkland said.

Conscientiousness and compassion were also evident in Kirkland's handling of disputes about owned dogs. "I spent a lot of time asking people to be neighborly," Kirkland explained. "I'd go to people's houses [and say], 'I know there is no leash law, but try to be neighborly.' Those were my words."

Most Blount Countians do want to be neighborly and to be responsible pet owners, in Kirkland's experience. "There were a few instances where I had to go back and talk to people again," he said, but most of the time residents addressed the concerns right away.

“The biggest thing is that people get overwhelmed. They don’t realize how much work it is to have an animal,” Kirkland said. “I’ve seen a lot of people who want to do good. They’ll take a dog or two because they’re trying to help people out, but then end up in the same situation themselves: overload, with a lot of dogs they cannot afford to feed.”

“I would want everybody to know that [becoming a pet owner] should not be a decision made on the spur of a moment,” Kirkland stressed.

A versatile law enforcement officer, Kirkland worked at the Blountsville Police Department for about nine years before joining the Blount County Sheriff’s Office in 1999. “I’ve done just about everything,” Kirkland said, including serving as a school resource officer and working in narcotics, property crimes, sex offender registration, and general investigations.

Now retired after 34 years in law enforcement, Kirkland reflected on the years to come. “I don’t fish; I don’t hunt; I’m going to have to find something to do!” he laughed. Definitely in the plans, Kirkland said: more motorcycle rides with his wife of 33 years, Teresa, a kindergarten teacher at Blountsville Elementary.

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Updates: The County’s new ACO Dep. Brock Echols was hired and set to begin Aug. 5, according Sheriff Mark Moon on an Aug. 2 conversation. The dog confinement law, which Kirkland referred to above as the “leash law,” was adopted by the Blount County Commission on Aug. 13, 2024.