

Devine up for the challenge of managing SPCA

BY KRISTIN MCNEILL

Westmounter Alanna Devine has had her hands full since taking over the helm of the embattled Montreal SPCA.

She resigned from the SPCA board and is now the organization's acting executive director. Devine replaces Jamie Allister, also a Westmounter, who remains on the board as treasurer.

Pierre Barnoti, the controversial figure who previously held the position of executive director, was officially released from his duties on July 23 for undisclosed reasons. The board is currently looking at candidates to fill the position permanently.

Devine, a lawyer, said she was already coming in to the shelter every day before being hired. She had decided she wanted to devote herself full time to animal welfare. Though she is not currently practising, some of her legal skills lend themselves to her role. "It's a way of thinking, of dealing with stressful situations. Being creative is helpful. And I'm comfortable speaking [publicly], and that helps a lot in this job because there is a large PR/media component."

The SPCA administration is working to overturn a negative public perception which continues to haunt the organization. Said Devine, "We still struggle with [our public] image, and that affects people wanting to donate and be involved. We are hoping that they will see we are true to our word and are really changing things."

New initiatives

One of the new initiatives being put into place is targeted donations to such

programs as Operation Feline (a spay/neuter clinic for cats of low-income owners), costs associated with future seizures or animals needing expensive surgeries.

There are certain critical periods when the shelter is especially busy, such as the July 1 moving day when many pets are left behind, and the higher-than-usual number of animals in need of care after a raid, such as was the case in October.

Despite these periods, there is rarely a



Alanna Devine, acting executive director of the Montreal SPCA with her own rescued dog, Layla.

quiet day. "There are everyday challenges facing the organization," Devine stated.

Devine said the current animal-cruelty laws and enforcement are in need of review, "We need a lot of changes provincially and federally. But Step One is to ensure at least we're working with what we have. The provincial government tried something that was different from all the other provinces, but these last two [October] seizures show that it's not enough; it's not working, so it's time to try something else."