



Hernando County Sheriff's Office

P.O. BOX 10070 – BROOKSVILLE, FL 34603-0070 FAX 352 796-0493 PHONE 352 754-6830

Media Release

From: Michael Terry
Community Relations Specialist, 352-797-3608

Re: HCSO Employee Spends Two Weeks Volunteering in Africa Vaccinating Dogs Against Rabies

Date: May 26, 2017

Not many would call spending two weeks in impoverished parts of Africa giving thousands of rabies shots to dogs much of a vacation.

That is unless you happen to be Hernando County Sheriff's Office Animal Enforcement Officer Linda Christian, who has spent the better part of her life caring for all types of animals.

Christian set out on May 11 to Blantyre, Malawi, to spend two weeks of her hard-earned vacation helping eradicate rabies from the small African nation currently under siege by the deadly disease.

Christian was one of 12 individuals chosen by the University of Florida to participate in the volunteer program.

Worldwide, rabies kills more than 61,000 people a year.

Statistics show that infected dog bites cause more than 99 percent of cases of human rabies. Once symptoms of the disease develops, it is always fatal.

According to recent published reports, in Malawi, nearly 500 people die each year due to rabies. Of the more than 400,000 dogs in the country, only one half of one percent are vaccinated against rabies annual.

A vaccination coverage of 70% of dogs is necessary to protect the more than 16.4 million people in Malawi from dog mediated rabies.

Christian is volunteering as part of a group called Mission Rabies, which launched in 2013.

The ultimate goal of the group, which is based in the United Kingdom, is to eliminate rabies from the world by 2030.

Since its inception, Mission Rabies volunteers are responsible for vaccinating more than 500,000 dogs in Africa and India.

While in Malawi, Christian said she spent most of her weekend days helping vaccinate between 200 and 1,200 dogs a day from stationary points in and around Blantyre.

During the weekdays, particularly Monday through Wednesday, the volunteers wake up at 4 a.m. each day and walk up to 10 miles a day on a mobile vaccination mission to reach outlying areas.

Prior to departing Malawi, Christian said was excited to be participating in the project.

Since she arrived on May 11, the group has been chronicling its efforts online at www.cliniciansbrief.com/mission-rabies.

In addition to vaccinating dogs, Christian also brought along some children's clothes provided by fellow Animal Enforcement Officer Jennifer Elswick to donate to the children of the impoverished African nation.

Christian will be returning to the United States in a few days and is looking forward to sharing some of her experiences and photos from her time in Malawi.

The Office of Sheriff:

The Office of the Sheriff is established by the Florida Constitution. As a constitutional officer, the Sheriff has the exclusive authority to administer his or her agency and is responsible for preserving the peace throughout the entire county, carrying out the laws of the state, the orders of Florida courts, and the ordinances of the Board of County Commissioners. The Sheriff is the chief law enforcement and correctional officer of the county.

Sheriff Al Nienhuis was initially appointed as the Sheriff of Hernando County by the Governor in January of 2011. He was then elected by the people of Hernando County in 2012, and remains accountable to them.