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IN AN EFFORT TO RID ITS PARKS OF CANADA GEESE UNION COUNTY IS GOING TO THE DOGS



From left to right, Sheriff Ralph Froehlich; Freeholder Vice Chairman Lewis Mingo, Jr.; Freeholder Daniel Sullivan; Sgt. Brian Way is holding Precious; Sgt. Ronnie Malcolm and his dog Panda.

Thanks to a new program using border collies to chase the birds, County officials are seeing results in their efforts to keep Canada geese off public facilities. In a tour of the County's golf facilities, Freeholder Vice Chairman Lewis Mingo, Jr., observed "a significant drop in the number of geese and their unhealthy droppings has been achieved."

Vice Chairman Mingo said the drop-off is directly attributable to the use of the border collies. "The dogs arrived the end of February and started work at Oak Ridge, Ash Brook and Galloping Hill golf courses in early March. They are doing such a good job we are now using them at the County parks," Mingo said.

The County purchased the three specially trained border collies from a breeder in upstate New York for \$1,200. Precious, a nine-month-old female, and 18-month-old brothers, Panda and Frisbee, are under the control of the Union County Sheriff's Department K-9 Unit, but the County Department of Parks and Recreation does the scheduling of where the dogs work. The program costs the County little to operate because it uses existing staff in both departments.

Sheriff Ralph Froehlich said officials felt this was the most environmentally safe method of ridding the County of Canada geese. "Border collies are extremely effective in geese control because they are bred to chase. They are not allowed to actually touch the birds, just harass them enough to make them look for better breeding areas. It could take a year to make them change their breeding habits," Sheriff Froehlich said.

Freeholder Daniel Sullivan, who also toured the golf courses to see how effective the border collies are, said the geese have been a problem for years. "They eat the grass down to the soil and leave behind large amounts of waste. The waste runs into streams and lakes, fouling the water. Golfers and park visitors complain about the geese and their droppings. Because the golf courses produce revenue for the County budget and the golfers petitioned the Freeholder Board, we decided to start our geese controlling program on the courses and then work the parks," Sullivan said.

"The dogs arrive and the geese just fly away," Freeholder Mary Ruotolo said. "The geese stay away when the dogs leave. They eventually return, but in smaller numbers each time. The program is working."

Galloping Hill Golf Course in Kenilworth is a 27-hole course that is undergoing \$4.6 million in renovations included new greens, tees, an irrigation system and better drainage. There were 80,000 rounds of golf a year and more than \$1 million in revenues at Galloping Hill last year. Ashbrook was opened in 1953 in Scotch Plains. It is a 616.2-acre, 18-hole course with a nine-hole pitch and putt added in 1964. Oak Ridge is the newest addition to Union County Golf facilities. It was acquired in 1974 and offers 169.4 acre course located in Clark.

Union County Freeholder Chairman Alexander Mirabella said the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Sheriff's K-9 unit should be thanked for their efforts to clean up County parks and golf courses. "In addition to other programs, such as planting shrubs along stream banks, our concerted efforts will keep the flocks of geese from spoiling our parks and golf courses," Chairman Mirabella said.

