Bielitz said, "We had to break up the fight."

Three animal control officers had to leash and remove the eight brawling dogs, who tried to turn their attentions on the interlopers, Bielitz said.

"They were mad at us for taking away their playmates," he said. "And Bielitz and his fellow officers are often called to break up the fight."

Bielitz said the most vivid memory he has of such an occasion is when he leashed and removed a Rottweiler that had a child pinned in the corner of a fence.

"The dog would not let that kid move," he said.

Getting the dog away saved the child from a possible mauling, Bielitz said.

When he gets home, he has only one more animal to deal with. "I have a cat," he said. "And it's an indoor cat" — spayed and fully vaccinated.

"And Bielitz shares.

"The thing about a pit bull is they bite, and they won't let go," he said. Not letting go is a trait the pit bulls figure largely in organizing dogfights Bielitz and his fellow officers are often called to break up.

"Once he latches on to something, he doesn't let go until it's resolved," Cole said. "We do go out with city or local police departments to assist them, including the occasional narcotics bust, Cole said.

"We do go out with city or local police departments to assist them with raids if there's animals involved," Bielitz said.

Animal Control is called out about four or five times a year for such raids, Cole said.

"It's exciting; it's not an everyday thing," Bielitz said. "I like being part of the team, getting something done."

Bielitz said he draws satisfaction in his job from the knowledge he has helped someone.

"The one thing that's most satisfying is when you have an animal that's really out to hurt someone, knowing that you have helped someone to keep from being hurt. And next to that, helping an animal from hurting itself," Bielitz said.

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Bielitz is one of six Animal Control officers who work 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. every weekday to help keep people safe from animals and animals safe from themselves.

They also work 8 a.m. to noon on Saturdays and have at least one officer on call 24 hours a day.

Bielitz is the center's third newest officer but already is an interim supervisor, said Hilton Cole, director of the Animal Control Center.

"Wayne's got qualities in that he's loyal, he's dedicated, he tries very hard," he said.

Stray or loose dogs are the most common situation the officers have to deal with, and neighbor complaints account for many of the calls to the center, Bielitz said.

But the neighbor calls are not always necessarily spurred by a problem with an animal's behavior, he said.

"We get a lot of neighbor disputes where you know it's a neighbor problem," Bielitz said. "Joe doesn't like David's dog, and David doesn't like Joe's cat, and they all don't like each other."

In such cases, one of the parties is sure to be unhappy with the outcome of the officer's visit, he said.

"Neighbors just aren't what they used to be," Bielitz said.

Bielitz isn't what he used to be either. He joined the animal control team about four years ago after retiring from an 18-year Army career.

An interest in outdoor work drew Bielitz to the Animal Control Center after nearly two decades of serving in Army artillery and infantry units.

"You notice both of those are outdoor work," Bielitz said.

The job keeps Bielitz outdoors, but he doesn't care a great deal for running down animals.

"You get a lot of walking. There's no sense running; you're not going to catch them anyway," he said. "Some people might say 'That dog's got a hurt leg.' They still got three; we got two."

The officers have several tools to deal with the animals, including leashes, catch poles, snake tongs and tranquilizer guns.

But the old standby is the tool every officer has with them at all times — voice.

"Voice is a big one. That's the first thing we try to do, catch it by voice," Bielitz said.

Bielitz's work isn't always just tracking down lone dogs, though; from time to time the calls can get quite lively.

"We had eight pit bulls fighting in a yard," he said. "And it's an indoor cat" — spayed and fully vaccinated.

Officer CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

Animal Control officers are not simply government employees, but commissioned law officers of the parish.