

Virginia Association of Counties  
**ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS**



## APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 3, 2019.** Please include this application form with electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](mailto:Gage.Harter@vacounties.org).

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Arlington County

Program Title: Tasty the Bunny

Program Category: Communications

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Lynne Porfiri

Title: Chief of Staff

Department: County Manager's Office

Telephone: (703) 228-0599 Website: www.arlingtonva.us

Email: lporfiri@arlingtonva.us

### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Mark J. Schwartz

Title: County Manager

Signature: *Mark J. Schwartz*

# Arlington official bunny on advent human



By Sarah Gibson  
May 31, 2018 1:24 pm



Do you recognize this bunny? If so, the

## Lost and Found:

The search for the owner of a lost stuffed animal became a hit Arlington social media tour of the County's vast Department of Environmental Services (DES) – all part of the trail as the toy bunny searched for a way back home.

### Executive Summary

In spring 2018, Arlington's Department of Environmental Services (DES) created an unlikely regional social media celebrity of a stuffed bunny rescued from the trash/recycling at an annual County street festival. The toy-in-search-of-its-young-owner gave the department an opportunity to showcase and humanize its vast responsibilities within the County. As with many social media campaigns that go viral, the story was picked up and spread by top-ranked Washington traditional news outlets, pointing a more general audience to the DES online presence. As of May 2019, the bunny had not been claimed but DES had used the heartwarming story to generate – at no direct cost – much attention and goodwill toward its frequently uncelebrated services and highly professional staff.

## Brief Overview

In trying to reunite a lost toy bunny with its heartbroken young owner, Arlington's Department of Environmental Services tapped still-positive viral powers of social media to showcase and humanize some unheralded but essential County services and staff.

What followed was a campaign that generated more than 266,000 social media impressions and tens of thousands of dollars in free traditional media coverage.

The bunny's story grew public familiarity with the department's vast responsibilities and generated a reservoir of goodwill even beyond the County's borders.

## The Adventure Begins

In May 2018, a County Solid Waste Bureau staffer spotted potential heartbreak amid hundreds of pounds of recycling and trash at the annual Taste of Arlington street festival: a somewhat soiled toy rabbit amid the empty bottles and soggy paper plates. A child was desperately missing a friend. Unable to locate an owner on site, the DES waste expert (and knowing mom) took the bunny home for a needed cleaning. The next day she turned to her five-person department communications squad for help.

While social media has become known in recent years as an often hostile, manipulated environment, its potential for widespread positive reach and rebroadcast remains inarguable.

Twitter, Facebook and other platforms are still uniquely effective for distributing – at no direct cost – simple stories that appeal immediately to the shared concerns of a community. They also generate a natural timeline that can build an audience with each new post, all heading toward an anticipated fulfilling conclusion.

The day after the festival, DES posted its initial social media alert, sharing the circumstances, a good photo and a “call to action” for public assistance. The County police department and emergency management unit were tagged as a natural way for spreading the word through established, credible partners.

That first post generated almost 30,000 impressions on Twitter alone while gaining almost 100 retweets. A concerned audience had tuned in. As hours passed, all that was missing was a legitimate claim of ownership. More posts would be needed.



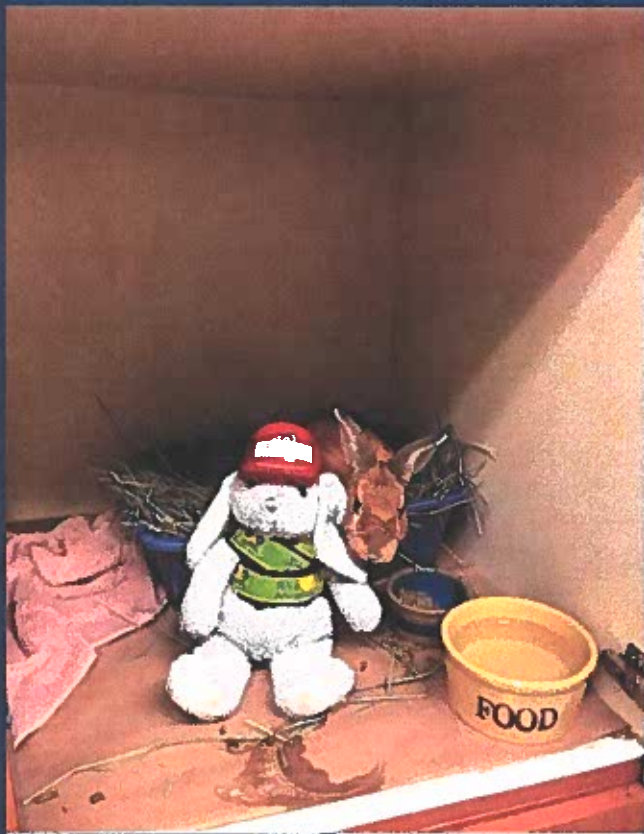




Looking for something to brighten the gloomy day? Follow the saga of the stuffed bunny via our friends @ArlingtonDES. It's a modern-day Velveteen Rabbit meets public works. 🍷❤️🐰

10:28 PM - May 15, 2018 · Twitter Web Client

3 retweets · 10 likes



Do you know someone missing a stuffed bunny who might have attended @TasteArlington earlier this month?

**Arlington Department of Environmental Services** [@ArlingtonDES](#)  
UPDATE: Despite tremendous community support, our friend found in @TasteArlington's compost recycling bin has not been claimed. Resuming search required departmental safety gear, starting with County 310 Mapping Center. [mex.arlingtonva.us](http://mex.arlingtonva.us)  
[Show this thread](#)



Let's help Dreamy Hugginz Bunny find his way back home! <http://www.nbcwashington.com/lost-bunny-arlington-va/>



This little bunny was found at Arlington officials were clearing up after the 20th annual Taste of Arlington Party. They took to Twitter on May 21 hoping to reunite it with its human if the owners of Arlington DES to read.



# FOUND BUNNY



**FOUND AT TASTE OF ARLINGTON SUNDAY MAY 20, 2018**

**TWEET @ArlingtonDES TO BE REUNITED WITH BUNNY**

Department of Environmental Services

[www.arlingtonva.us](http://www.arlingtonva.us)

**WUSA9**

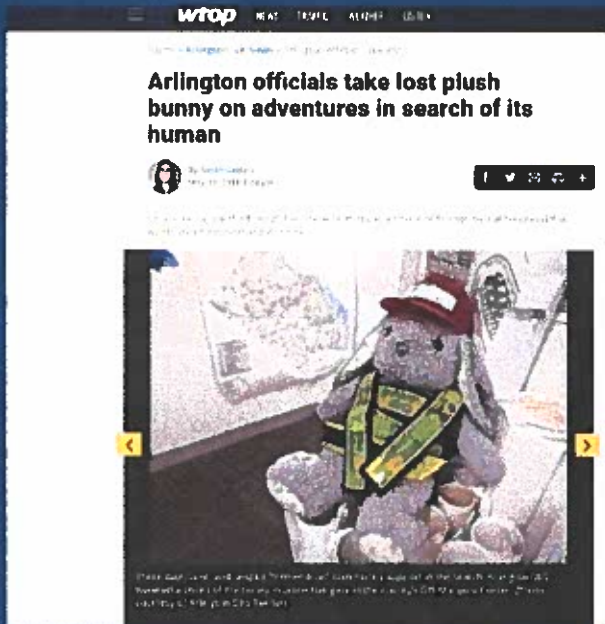
**wtop**

virginia

# LOST: Stuffed bunny found in Va. searches for home

Is this your bunny?

By Erin Thayer  
7:09 PM EDT June 1, 2018  
7:35 PM EDT June 1, 2018



# ARLnow

*Local is everything*

AROUND TOWN

## Lost Stuffed Bunny Still Searching for Home, With Some Help from County Officials

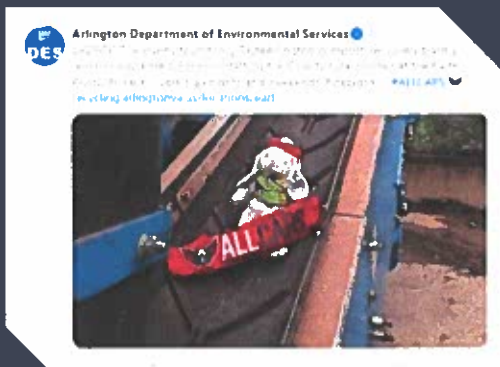
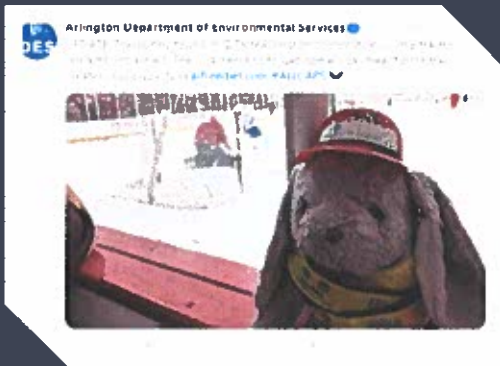
Melanie PinCUS June 1, 2018 at 1:45pm



# The Washington Post

Virginia Politics

## A lost bunny searches for home all over Arlington



As frequently occurs with a viral social media success, traditional news organizations picked up and spread the story to much wider audience. The Washington Post, top-rated all-news radio WTOP and most Washington area television news operations ran pieces as did the National Association of Counties' "County News." The bunny was even the subject of a Post letter to the editor from the Solid Waste Association of North America's executive director citing the "need to be smarter about what we place in the recycling bin."

By coincidence, bunny posts were also able to connect with the local fan base in cheering the Washington Capitals' successful drive to the NHL championship. At one point he was seen monitoring traffic with a Nicklas Backstrom garden gnome. Later he attended a Capitals practice session at the Arlington iceplex owned by the County and leased to the team. The facility is also home to the Capitals' front office and a County-operated parking garage. Many Capital players call Arlington home, at least during the season.

With the bunny's growing celebrity, DES received appearance requests from other County organizations looking to boost their own social media presence. One cameo at the Animal



Welfare League of Arlington showed the bunny nestled with genuine critters in search of their own permanent homes.

But as spring 2018 turned into summer, it became clear that more than 266,000 social media impressions and tens of thousands of dollars' worth of free traditional media would not reunite the bunny with its owner. A handful of claims were easily disproved. Still, DES social media grew with hundreds of new followers, traffic to department web pages rose by similar levels and Arlington residents and businesses had a better understanding of the many roles and human side of DES.

Every few months, someone inquires through Twitter or Facebook as to the fate of the bunny, allowing for one more update to the thread. New likes to the old posts also appear on occasion. Should the rightful owner ultimately come forward, DES will be ready to share the epilogue of an already popular story.