

The success of trappings

Critters are caught, not killed

By Fred Lucas
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The baby raccoon is a piece of cake. John and Steve mount the porch steps and disappear inside, emerging minutes later with the masked intruder in a carrying cage. They'll come back for the mother later, and then reunite the whole family in a park or forest.

The next job, a pigeon removal, promises to be messier. But it's no go because the owner isn't home. On to a garage that is starting to look like a bat cave, and then to a fox extraction — all in a day's work for employees of the Adcock Trapping Service.

The trappers, who made headlines across the nation last spring when they captured and relocated a family of beavers that had been felling cherry trees around the Tidal Basin, normally do their job quietly, efficiently and humanely.

The College Park-based company has been in business since 1976, trapping and relocating beavers and other rodents, as well as reptiles, birds and virtually every other animal that can invade homes, property or offices.

Getting a lot of media attention wasn't something they were used to. "The beaver, so far is over and above anything else we've done. We were front-page news," said John Adcock Jr., president of the company, which was paid about \$3,000 for the removal.

"It was an unusual job. We do a good lot of beaver work, but not in such a high visibility area."

Despite the massive publicity, Mr. Adcock said, the job was easy compared with other situations that he and his foreman, Steve Smelgus, and 14 employees have faced — the baby raccoon notwithstanding.

The company makes more than \$1 million handling about 4,000 cases each year, Mr. Adcock said. Prices for removing animals vary from less than \$75 to \$250 depending on the type of animals and how hard it is to remove them.

Beyond trapping and removing, company workers focus on structural problems such as holes in walls where animals can enter. Most of the employees have backgrounds as carpenters and roofers. They work mostly for private homes, but have worked for apart-

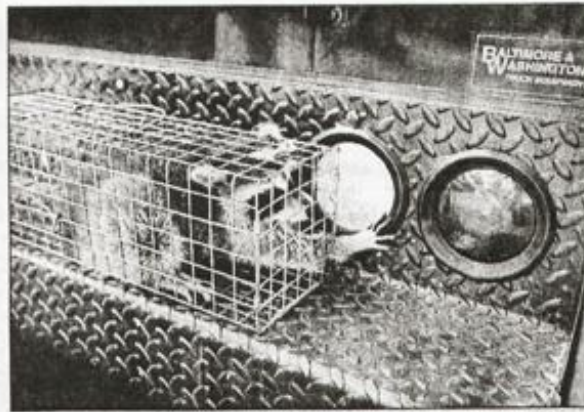


Photos by Mary F. Calvert/The Washington Times

John Adcock Jr. does a follow-up check on damage caused by beavers in a wooded area next to homes in Bethesda. His firm became prominent recently when it caught beavers in the Tidal Basin.



Steve Smelgus of Adcock Trapping Service searches for foes living in a home in Bethesda. A 2-month-old raccoon paws at the firm's truck after the creature was removed from a homeowner's property in Northwest.



ment complexes, local universities and government agencies.

"If it runs, climbs, slithers or flies, we'll catch it and keep it out, guaranteed," their ads say and employees do plenty to keep that promise. Despite having to crawl through sewers, through walls and onto roofs, Mr. Smelgus said he doesn't get tired of the job.

"Every day is different; it's a challenge always," said the 13-year employee.

This is what founder John Adcock Sr. loves about the work. Having been a trapper since childhood, he was often called on when local people were in a jam, or when pest control companies couldn't handle a problem. Word of mouth spread, so he just decided to do it full time, and the business has grown since then. At the age of 60, he is semi-retired and his children Michael,

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Michelle and John Jr. run the company.

"It works very smoothly, very informal," he said. "The neat thing about this business is it's not just the same old thing every day, not just humdrum . . ."

Among the more unusual cases: ridding a barn of about 400 bats, clearing a sewer line of two dozen rats, capturing an 8-foot lizard and

removing an 18-foot boa constrictor from the walls of a house.

Relocating animals into national parks or forests and dealing with structural problems, such as sealing holes, installing one-way doors — which allow the animal to exit, but not re-enter — or concrete footers is the most humane way to do the job, Mr. Adcock said.

He said 95 percent of all the animals they get are relocated or "evicted," though Maryland and Virginia law requires the killing of some animals posing a rabies

threat.

"A lot of guys are just catching critters and throwing them in traps, that's the most inhumane thing you can do," Mr. Adcock said. "We're far and away the most humane people out there. We resolve it; everybody else just maintains it. There's always a source of the problems, but in most cases it's cheaper to keep tossing poison out."

There have been complaints from animal rights groups, and even an occasional physical attack

but most groups come around when its properly explained what the company does, Mr. Adcock said. But said there are still "diehards who think animals have more rights than people and you are not going to change them."

Some prominent animal groups will vouch for them, especially when comparing them with other companies which they say only offer short term, less humane solutions.

"They do as much as anyone in the business to work responsibly

and humanely," said John Hadidian, director of urban wildlife for the Humane Society of the United States.

Stephanie Boyles, wildlife case-worker for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, said she is glad to hear about a company that pledges to taking preventive measures, though she would much rather home owners work to make their property "unattractive or inaccessible to animals."

"One-way doors are wonderful; I always like to have that," she said

"I hope they keep their word on that. There has been an explosion on these kind of companies. They're so new that there are no regulations."

As he waited outside an apartment complex with a pigeon problem, Mr. Smelgus quickly spotted the source of the trouble — a clear, unprotected building ledge.

A pigeon, he explained, "likes to look over the edge. Back him up about four inches, and he won't be there."