

## **Donations save 56 Doña Ana County dogs from euthanization**

**By Diana M. Alba/Sun-News reporter**

**Posted: 06/19/2009 12:00:00 AM MDT**

LAS CRUCES - Following an overwhelming response from the public, 56 dogs that shelter officials had said they'd euthanize by the end of the week will be spared, Doña Ana County officials said Thursday.

The animals were going to be euthanized to make room for 12 pit bulls that were to be transferred to the shelter from another site, where they're being held by the county as evidence in an unresolved court case. The county announced Thursday that, thanks to donations, they have now been able to find an alternate site for those pit bulls.

The Do-a Ana County Sheriff's Office has fielded offers to provide funding "anywhere from a few hundreds of dollars to operational funds for up to six months," said County Manager Brian Haines.

The sheriff's office said it's continuing to accept donations.

Wednesday, an official with the county's animal control division, part of the sheriff's office, had said the pit bulls would be transferred to the shelter because a grant paying for care workers is set to expire July 1.

Meanwhile, shelter director Beth Vesco-Mock said interest from residents about adopting the 56 puppies and adult dogs soared on Thursday. She said the facility fielded at least 80 phone calls on the matter and adopted out 10 animals. On an average day, she said, the shelter adopts about two.

"It's swamped here," she said. "So many people asked me not to put the puppies to sleep."

Before the announcement Thursday, the [Humane Society of Southern New Mexico](#), a Las Cruces-based nonprofit, pitched a plan to elected officials, calling on them to suspend action on transferring the pit bulls so a better solution could be found.

County Commissioner Scott Krahling, chairman of the city-county board that oversees the shelter, said he heard from a number of constituents who were concerned about the 56 dogs. He said the matter "puts a face to the story" of the ongoing problem of pet overpopulation in the county.

Krahling said he hopes it draws attention to ways the public can help reduce pet euthanasias.

"It's an opportunity for us to talk about some of the programs, like the fostering program," he said. "You can foster animals, and you don't have to take long-term responsibility. Hopefully all of the support we've gotten from the public, offering to make donations and do whatever they can do to help this situation - hopefully it turns into action."

Though the 56 dogs won't be killed this week, Vesco-Mock noted that euthanasias are an everyday occurrence at the crowded shelter. On average, she said, about 1,000 dogs and cats are euthanized monthly.

Vesco-Mock and County Sheriff Todd Garrison said that solving the problem in the long-run will require more spaying and neutering of pets.

The Sun-News received numerous calls and e-mails from residents interested in helping find homes for the dogs that could have been euthanized.

The pit bulls were seized by the county as evidence in August 2007 for a case entailing allegations of dog fighting. But a state district judge in February suppressed all evidence in the case after concluding a search warrant was invalid. The state has appealed the matter to the New Mexico Court of Appeals, and a preliminary judgment by the court affirmed the district court's ruling. However, a final decision hasn't yet been issued.

The pit bulls' owners, brothers Daron and Duryea Scott, have not been convicted on the charges and have not relinquished ownership of the dogs. The brothers said they are show dog breeders.

Haines said until the county establishes a budget item to spend the donations for the pit bulls' care, funding will come from the sheriff's department's temporary-employee budget.

The shelter, called the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley, is overseen by a board of Las Cruces and Doña Ana County elected officials.

Diana M. Alba can be reached at [dalba@lcsun-news.com](mailto:dalba@lcsun-news.com); (575) 541-5443.

### **If you adopt**

What: adopting pets from the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley

When: noon to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday; noon to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

Where: Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley, 3551 Bataan Memorial West, Las Cruces

Information: (575) 382-0018

- cat adoption fee: \$50
- dog adoption fee: \$75

### **If you donate**

To donate to the Doña Ana County Sheriff's Office for the care of the 12 pit bulls, make a check payable to the sheriff's office and mail to:

Doña Ana County Sheriff's Office, 845 N. Motel Blvd., Las Cruces, N.M. 88007