

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

City tells animal shelter to stop Downtown Mall adoptions

By Diana M. Alba/Sun-News reporter

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LAS CRUCES - The city of Las Cruces is no longer allowing the city-county animal shelter to adopt out animals during the downtown farmer's market because the practice goes against city ordinances, officials said.

The shelter, called the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley, was told to discontinue the adoptions after the first weekend in April - the first adoption event of the year the shelter held in the downtown mall, said shelter director Beth Vesco-Mock.

"We're not legally allowed to be there," she said.

At issue are two parts of the municipal code, said Christine Logan, city of Las Cruces economic development administrator. One prohibits people from giving away dogs, cats, rabbits or birds. Another allows only homemade, hand-crafted items or produce grown by the seller to be offered at the market, she said.

Said Las Cruces Mayor Ken Miyagishima: "We don't want the public to think the rules don't apply to the city as well."

Vesco-Mock said, on average, two to three animals would be adopted during events at the market.

"Those are three lives that did not die, and it opened up the spaces up here" at the shelter, she said.

But more importantly, Vesco-Mock said, the event raised awareness about the Animal Services Center.

"It helps to get volunteers," she said. "We're really missing out on an opportunity for public awareness."

Vesco-Mock said she's working with the owner of the Moose Lodge, at the north end of the downtown mall, on a proposal to allow adoption events to continue there. The lodge's parking lot is near the sidewalk of the downtown mall, and, because it's privately owned, the ordinance wouldn't apply, she said.

Logan said the city is working on proposed changes to the ordinances that could accommodate the shelter. They could be ready by summer or early fall.

Pet adoptions on Saturdays at the Las Cruces Farmers & Crafts Market were first organized by a local humane society group last year. Vesco-Mock said the shelter then began coordinating the adoption event in June and continued throughout the year. She said the shelter didn't host events at the farmers market in January, February and March because of the cold weather, but had planned to start them up again this spring.

Vesco-Mock said usually between eight and 10 dogs and between six and 10 kittens were on display at the farmers market. The same goes for adoption events held at other locations, she said.

Do-a Ana County Commissioner Scott Krahling, chairman of the animal shelter's governing board, said he visited the farmers market that weekend in April, and it happened that three people were signing papers to adopt animals at the time. Krahling said the venue is good exposure for the pets, and, though the city shouldn't go against its ordinance and allow animal shelter pets to be adopted there, it could consider amending the rule.

"I'm in favor of them at least looking at it because it's just a great location for us to get out and do some adoptions," he said.

Vesco-Mock said the shelter has continued off-site adoptions on weekends, alternating hosting events at three other locations. She said the goal is to hold two such events each weekend.

An off-site adoption event is slated for today at Petco, 3050 E. Lohman Ave., Las Cruces.

Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley is governed by a board of Las Cruces and Do-a Ana County elected officials.

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