

## **Animal shelter is filling up rapidly**

**By Steve Ramirez / Sun-News reporter**

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LAS CRUCES - The animal control trucks keep dropping off new pickups at the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley.

Dr. Beth Vesco-Mock, director of the animal shelter, said Monday the facility is on a pace to receive more than 15,000 animals by the end of the year. Just as Vesco-Mock disclosed that, more trucks with more animals drove into the shelter.

"There's four animal control trucks in the back parking lot unloading," Vesco-Mock said. "One had 13 dogs in it. I don't know how many animals we've adopted out today, but I'm sure it wasn't 13 dogs."

For months, the shelter, at 3551 W. Bataan Memorial West, has been busting at the seams with animals of all sizes and colors. Animal shelters in El Paso and Albuquerque, whose populations are more than four times larger than Las Cruces', are expected to take in about 27,000 animals this year.

Talk of expanding the facility is only that, for now, as Vesco-Mock said it would likely take a strong capital campaign to raise enough money to enlarge the shelter.

"Ideally, the goal would be to turn this into a campus," Vesco-Mock said. "We could use a new adoption facility and a separate low-cost medical facility. Right now we're in a 20 (foot) by 20 (foot) building for adoptions that is very small; and a low-cost medical facility would be where people could take their pets and animals for medical care at costs less than what a veterinarian would otherwise charge them.

"But to make all of that happen it probably will take a capital campaign, some serious fund raising, to make that happen. Unfortunately, the city and county, and the state, don't have the money available to make those facilities become a reality."

City Manager Terrence Moore said he has begun working with Animal Protection Voters of New Mexico, an Albuquerque based nonprofit organization that lobbies for laws and state funding that better protects animals. In a letter sent to Gov. Bill Richardson, Moore said that Las Cruces' continued growth has made it increasingly difficult for the ASCMV to operate efficiently.

"Not only does the ASCMV handle unwanted domestic animals, but it also provides space to hold animals in protective custody from cruelty cases," Moore said. "...Providing this essential service leaves limited space for adoptable animals in the shelter."

Moore also pointed out that the center is in need of structural improvements, such as a new heating, ventilation and air conditioning system.

"We are asking for your support of a comprehensive project that would encompass both city and county facilities," said Moore, in a portion of his letter to Richardson. "Such a project is a high priority for our region, which is struggling to deliver animal services that will ensure public safety and the humane treatment of animals."

Moore said Monday that the ASCMV will "do the best we can with what we have available," but he also appreciates the interest that Animal Protection Voters have taken in the matter.

"This is an organization that is supportive of the initiatives that are being pursued and we welcome any help they might be able to provide," Moore said. "I look forward to a continued working relationship that could hopefully prove beneficial to the city and county."

Vesco-Mock said she wouldn't venture a guess on the total cost to expand shelter facilities, but estimates that a low-cost medical facility could have a price tag of \$1 million.

However, Vesco-Mock added that maintenance of existing facilities must remain a critical concern.

"Yes, we need a new heating and cooling system, and we need to repaint the entire facility and improve the kennel area," Vesco-Mock said.

The focus also must remain on doing everything possible to reduce the euthanasia percentage at the shelter. Vesco-Mock described that as a "never-ending battle" that often makes for sad days.

"We've lost quite a few puppies lately," she said. "With the intake staying close to the same levels they've been at for a while it's difficult to get ahead of that euthanasia rate but we'll keep trying. It's at 63 percent now and the goal is to get it down to 62 percent by the end of the year. We're going to be very close to that, barring an unforeseen catastrophe."

To spark animal adoptions, Vesco-Mock is initiating the shelter's first-ever "Black Friday Adoption." Adoptions of animals at the shelter will be conducted Friday in the parking lot of the Wal-Mart Supercenter, off of Walton Boulevard, and at the ASCMV.

Adoption fees will be \$75 for dogs and puppies and \$50 for cats and kittens. The fee includes the first set of vaccinations, spay or neutering of the animal, and microchipping.

Also, microchipping for pets that already have homes will be available to the public for \$20. City pet licenses will be available for \$5 if the animal has been spayed or neutered or \$25 for an unaltered pet. Pet owners must bring current proof of spay or neutering, and rabies vaccination for each animal to be licensed.

For more information about the ASCMV's "Black Friday Adoption," call the center at (575) 382-0018. People who are hearing-impaired can call (575) 541-2182.

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