

Puppies find homes, but Las Cruces shelter still overwhelmed

By Ashley Meeks Sun-News reporter

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To see photos from the shelter, click [here](#).

LAS CRUCES -- The mama dog had already been adopted with her two male pups when Tanya Ackerman arrived at the shelter Tuesday, looking for a dog that would get along well with her elderly mother.

But Ackerman, 47, a speech therapist with the public schools, couldn't pick one.

"I adopted two sisters -- they are the cutest things," she said Friday, laughing. "I couldn't separate them."

Her daughter named the bigger, gold-colored puppy "Bonnie" and the tiny white one "Annie" -- and introduced them to "Tucker," their feline "older brother," Ackerman said.

"He's trying to play with them," she said. "They're so young that they're not quite sure what to do, but they're getting along. They're getting used to each other."

Bonnie and Annie were just two of the more than 130 dogs that have been adopted since Sunday, when Beth Vesco-Mock, director of the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley, put out a public plea to help with the more than 360 dogs that have been brought to the shelter since the start of the year.

Unfortunately, "it doesn't make a dent."

Though 50 puppies were saved from euthanasia, even more animals have flooded the shelter since Sunday, she said, including four 3-week-old terrier mixes small enough to fit in your hand and an 8-week-old female purebred Rottweiler nicknamed "Mitten" because of her two extra toes.

"Everyone says, 'oh, look at its feet! It's huge!' It looks like a mitt. If I adopted her, I would call her Mitten or some baseball name because she just looks like she has a mitten," Vesco-Mock said of the pup, dumped in Las Cruces and found wandering the streets by city animal control. "They let her loose because that's what breeders do whenever there's a recessive gene showing up. If someone was buying any of their dogs for breeding, they would not want it."

Though they've only had to euthanize five too-sick puppies instead of the expected 50, shelter staff has gotten a small heap of abuse -- mostly by e-mail.

"This is inhumane and you all ought to be ashamed of yourself," one woman wrote Sunday night. "My family and I would adopt all those sweet faces, but we've done our share and have three already which makes our house full."

Vesco-Mock said she doesn't mind being judged, but that it's unproductive.

"We're just overwhelmed with happiness and respect for the community, that so many have come out to foster, knowing that these pups were very small, some were not healthy, they still took the challenge," she said. "Let's all work together to solve this problem. It's a huge problem in this community. It has been for a while. Let us stop blaming and let's work together. Don't blame the shelter. Let's work together so the shelter doesn't have this issue."

She added, "I'm going to keep putting these numbers out there until the community wakes up and accepts this stuff"

Ackerman said she was shocked when she saw not only the hundreds of small puppies that had been dumped on the shelter, but also how many mother dogs had been abandoned.

A Las Cruces resident on-and-off for 20 years, she agreed with Vesco-Mock's assessment that area residents don't understand the importance of spaying and neutering their pets, thereby "leaving the responsibility up to someone else -- neglecting their responsibility," Ackerman said.

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"There's a real problem," she said. "I think most people, they obviously love animals, but if they know they're going to be euthanized, maybe that would make a difference in their decision to spay or neuter. A lot of people don't realize the problem."

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Want a puppy?

• The Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley will hold off-site dog adoption events today at the downtown farmer's market from noon to 1 p.m. and from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Pet Barn, 1600 S. Valley Drive -- that event will also feature cats. Call (575) 382-0018 for more information or visit www.ascmv.org.

Report overpopulation

• City residents must have a kennel license if they own more than two domestic animals -- up to two litters of puppies up to 3 months old not included -- and county residents may own up to six domestic animals without a kennel license. City and county animal control urge residents to call animal control to report violations, which often occur concurrently with care, maintenance, health and welfare problems. Callers do not have to identify themselves.

In the city, call (575) 528-4100. In the county, call (575) 647-7715.

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