

# LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

## **Shelter director's contract extended**

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

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LAS CRUCES - Recent criticism of the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley didn't appear to affect shelter Director Beth Vesco-Mock's annual performance review Thursday.

The city-county animal shelter board emerged from a closed session at the end of a meeting and announced a one-year contract extension for Vesco-Mock. She was hired under a three-year contract that was set to expire in 2011. But now it will run through 2012, said Do-a Ana County spokesman Jess Williams, also an animal shelter board member.

Williams said there was no discussion about a pay raise.

Prior to the closed session, Vesco-Mock fired back at opponents, saying recent criticism of the shelter is an example of "finger-pointing" that has been "going on for 10 years, according to some accounts. But I know for a fact it has been going on since April 2008."

"While I was still living in Georgia, I had people calling me and telling me their viewpoint of each official, each of the city and county managers, of the staff at the shelter and just overall how awful everything and everybody was," Vesco-Mock said, referring to the period just before she started as director of the shelter.

Vesco-Mock said she thought at the time that "they really care and are going to get in there and do some real, life-saving activities."

"All they did then was complain about everything and everybody ... and that is what they're still doing 26 months later," she said.

Vesco-Mock didn't specify any names. But her statement came after a report released last week by the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico that listed a number of complaints with the facilities and operations.

The most imminent problem was an infestation of mice in an outbuilding used to quarantine sick dogs as they recover.

Las Cruces city officials have said an exterminator is handling the situation in the short-term. But a long-term assessment of how to address the problem will be needed.

Shelter Board Chairman Miguel Silva, a city councilor, decided to appoint a task force to look into the building complaints.

Frank Bryce, president of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico, an outspoken shelter critic, said the task force was a good idea. But he still has concerns about shelter operations.

"The things that are getting done are brought to you by the public, and then we take an action," he said. "We need leadership at this shelter that beats us; the leadership should be ahead of us."

About 40 people attended the session, held in the Do-a Ana County Government Center, 845 N. Motel Blvd. Many were split into two camps: supporters and opponents of Vesco-Mock.

Jake Sims, president of the Do-a Ana County Humane Society, a different group than the one headed by Bryce, told board members they needed to "look behind the curtain, and look at what's motivating this and where it's coming from."

"Some of the people who have been so critical think they ought to be running the shelter, yet they have no positive input for anything," he said. "You need to support the director you've got; she's the best you've had."

Jane Carter, a shelter volunteer, noted that there are two humane societies locally and contended that one of them is an "anti-shelter society."

"Using the name humane society is a front for continuing agitation that goes on year after year, in spite of any progress made," she said. "I don't think we have animal advocates; we have agitators."

Humane Society of Southern New Mexico Vice President Marlyn Zahler said the criticism isn't meant to be a personal attack, but is intended to draw attention to policy issues.

Some attendees said reducing the number of stray animals across the county is the best hope of solving problems at the shelter. Another said the county and city should boost funding to the shelter facilities.

Williams said Vesco-Mock's contract extension will be formally voted upon at the board's July meeting.

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### **On the Web**

- Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley: <http://www.ascmv.org>

Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley board members

- Miguel Silva, city councilor
- Dolores Connor, city councilor
- Nathan Small, city councilor
- Oscar Vásquez-Butler, county commissioner
- Scott Krahling, county commissioner
- Jess Williams, county spokesman