

## **Animal shelter turns documents over to Humane Society**

**By Diana M. Alba DALBA@LCSUN-NEWS.COM**

**Posted: 11/23/2011 10:08:17 PM MST**

LAS CRUCES - The Doña Ana County-Las Cruces animal shelter has handed over a few hundred pages of records to a local humane society, effectively ending a recent lawsuit filed by the group.

The Humane Society of Southern New Mexico filed the suit early this month, claiming the shelter had failed to supply all of the documents it requested about 72 animals classified as lost, missing or stolen from the shelter in 2010.

Frank Bryce, president of HSSNM, said the group considers the lawsuit "over and done," though attorneys from both sides are still hashing out details about the legal expenses.

"We've gotten the information," he said. "It's a big packet, and we're reviewing it to see if there's anything else that needs to be added" to the request.

The humane society had received the full packet of documents - about the size of a ream of paper - by Friday morning, according to Bryce.

The group first requested the documents in April, and, though the shelter provided some records, the humane society complained that they were incomplete. Bryce has said the humane society wants to review case files of the pets to find out why they disappeared.

The length of time since the initial request is "kind of disturbing," Bryce said, "but we feel it's a good step. It was the right thing for the shelter and board to do, finally."

Other animal welfare advocates have taken aim at Bryce and his humane society, contending the information request is meant to put up roadblocks for shelter Executive Director Beth Vesco-Mock.

Sherry Garra, president of the Spay Neuter Action Program of Doña Ana County, described the lawsuit as "continued harassment" of the shelter by HSSNM. She said the group seems to imply that purebred pets are being stolen by someone at the shelter and resold. But a reality of the shelter's foster program - which puts pets in foster homes until they're adopted - is that animals sometimes escape from their caretakers.

"I don't know how, in any way, this suit can help the shelter," she said. "How is this helping the animals and the community?"

Bryce has contended his intent isn't to cause problems for the shelter, but rather get to the bottom of why animals have gone missing and correct the problem. He said that can't be done without a thorough analysis of the records - a process that will take some time.

"We just now started looking into the information provided," he said.

Doña Ana County Commissioner Billy Garrett, who heads the city-county board that runs the animal shelter, said he's "glad the issue has been resolved and we can move on."

"The concern I've had as chair of the board has been to improve the management of the shelter, and I think we've come a long ways in the past year," he said.

Asked whether he thought the shelter responded too slowly in providing the records, Garrett said he thought there were misunderstandings occurring.

"What I want to focus on is that the request has been taken care of," he said.

Diana M. Alba can be reached at (575) 541-5443.