

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

COMMENTARY: A Christmas story about a friend to man and animals

By Mike Hainer For the Sun-News

Article Launched: 12/21/2008 12:00:00 AM MST

Our history as humans is bound by creation and development to our relationship with animals for sustenance, accomplishing work beyond our own strength, companionship and, for many people today, provides them with a livelihood that supports them financially and professionally. Thanks to all the people who choose a career building a more compassionate relationship with the animals who share our planet with us.

One of today's best examples of this positive co-existence with animals are the many volunteers that dedicate themselves to improving the welfare of our animal companions, both domestic and wild. Southern New Mexico is blessed with so many dedicated people investing their time to improve companion animal welfare. I have been fortunate to make a friend who is a shining example of this love, commitment and untiring effort for animal welfare.

My friend has taught a generation of children and citizens the value of our native snakes, lizards and other wildlife, replacing fear and misunderstanding with knowledge and safety. Rescuing lost reptiles in our neighborhoods and returning them to a safe home occurs almost weekly. Our local Natural History Museum still benefits from the volunteer development work done there. My friend led the community effort for legislation to install the three-year rabies vaccine in New Mexico to bring our great state current with humane pet practices for protection against rabies. When it came to putting hard-earned money in place of talk, my friend has made major financial contributions to support Safe Haven Animal Shelter, The Doña Ana County Humane Society, many Pet Expo events in Las Cruces, the Free Spay Neuter Program and many more animal welfare organizations and efforts in our community. But the money invested is trumped many times over by all the time dedicated toward improved animal welfare.

For years, my friend has volunteered to work at our community animal shelter, including repairs to failing mechanical systems, creating solutions for unsafe and impractical animal-holding conditions and tirelessly pointing out and working on opportunities for improvement in our public animal welfare services. Dozens of trips a month are made to our animal shelter to help in any way possible, often in the face of stiff criticism for the ingenuity and perseverance toward creating a better life for the animals there.

Want to help adopt or rescue a homeless cat or dog? My friend helped lead the team that initiated the Farmer's Market Saturday morning pet adoptions this year, as well as the current volunteer-operated PetSmart Cat Adoption Center, both directed at rescuing homeless animals from our community animal shelter. My friend also fosters animals from the shelter until adopted, and cares for many others to keep them out of our community shelter and provide the best opportunity for placement in a home.

When county Animal Control Services was faced with overwhelming needs, my friend was one of the first to serve in the Volunteer Animal Control Reserve, caring daily for court-hold animals needing shelter, companionship and basic daily care and organizing fundraising for improving their housing, comfort and safety. My friend was a leader there when animals were in need. He served on a committee to New Mexico's new Animal Sheltering Board, was an advocate to People United for Pets in Las Cruces, and was an initial board member forming the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico.

Being an outspoken advocate with a sense of truthfulness and honesty is not always appreciated by the faint of heart. In addition, my friend is a volunteer driver of the new county animal rescue van for pet spay and neuter events by our local Spay Neuter Action Program. He is an informal adviser and comforter to overwhelmed people with animals in need. He is good-humored and a bearded friend with a warm smile, a soft chuckle, and a twinkle in the eye for so many thousands of animals and people.

I remain uncertain if Santa Claus is not a yearround watcher over the animals in Las Cruces, but I am certain of this. I am very lucky to have met and grown to love my dear friend, Frank Bryce. He is one among the legion of volunteers working across southern New Mexico each day to bring us all a better day for humans and animals alike.

If you are interested in volunteering at the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley, or one of the many animal welfare organizations in our community please go to www.hssnm.org for contact information, or call us at (575) 523-8020. We will help you find an opportunity that matches your talents and wishes.

Mike Hainer is president of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico.