

On the Positive Side: Teaming Up for Animals

Frank Bryce, President, Humane Society of Southern New Mexico

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You may get a chance to join the Siamese, Bulldog, Terrier, Tabby, Shepherd, Persian or Pointer teams soon to help resolve animal welfare issues in Dona Ana County. After literally years of contentious confrontation and fragmented efforts between the animal welfare groups and city and county officials, two government officials appear to be truly accepting leadership roles in addressing these issues. At the urging and support from the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico (HSSNM) and Animal Welfare and Responsibility Education (AWARE) organizations, Las Cruces Mayor Miyagashima recently hosted a meeting with animal advocates on September 20th to propose a collaborative and collective effort between all the interested parties. Recruited by the Mayor, County Commissioner Billy Garrett, chair of the Animal Services Center of Mesilla Valley shelter, partnered with the Mayor to present what is called a "Comprehensive Community Strategy" to reduce animal euthanasia in Dona Ana County. This could be a positive initiative sorely needed at a time when our pet welfare resources are overwhelmed and throwing more dollars at the problem in the same old way does not work.

Commissioner Garrett's proposal for developing seven teams of individuals and representatives of animal welfare organizations with particular interests, passions and expertise has already drawn some lively comments but the following comments, from Michelle Corella, Director, NMSU Feral Cat Management Program, one of the attendees, perhaps best describes the meeting. "...During the meeting, Mr. Garrett made it abundantly clear that his plan was not the "only way to go", but was simply a way for many disparate animal welfare groups/individuals in this area to come together collectively and begin "plugging in" to their area of interest in order to get the many numbers of "boots on the ground" that will be needed to succeed. He also indicated that the "seven year" bench mark was not set in stone, and that if the goal was achieved sooner, it would be a victory for everyone – especially the animals.

While some groups overlap in their areas of interest/expertise, I think it is fair to say that, historically, we have had a problem unifying our collective strengths in order to make a significant impact toward achieving the "no kill" goal. Part of this stems from the fact that, until relatively recently, we haven't been successful in engaging our local elected leaders. Since our shelter and both City and County Animal Control entities fall under the jurisdiction of our City and County, I feel that it is imperative to have "buy in" from these groups in order to effect significant change. The fact that ASCMV Board Chair/County Commissioner Garrett and Mayor Miyagashima are endorsing this plan is, in my opinion, very important.

If we can accomplish some or all of these goals in a year – fabulous! If it takes a little longer, I think those of us in this area who have been working FOR YEARS to make things better, could live with that – if we can just see some progress! For instance, TNR is not even legal in Las Cruces/Dona Ana County. Until our ordinances are changed to allow TNR, this "piece" of the No-Kill puzzle cannot be put into place. However, those of us interested in TNR can pursue that goal (plus items outlined in Mr. Garrett's matrix) while other groups are progressing forward in other areas. In my opinion, if this plan is properly implemented, with sufficient volunteer and other resources, I think it has a real chance of succeeding."

The Humane Society of Southern New Mexico agrees and urges your support for this initiative.

Frank Bryce is President of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico. Interested authors for "On The Positive Side" can contact HSSNM at (575) 523-8020.