

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE: Collaboration Contributes Care and Compliance
Frank Bryce, President, Humane Society of Southern New Mexico
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Saturday, September 30, this past week, was a day one could feel, and hope, was typical of our community in southern New Mexico in many respects. The day had wonderfully comfortable pre-fall weather, breezy and sunny, framing a collaborative community effort that constituted concern for pet welfare and public safety. With pets and pet owners seeming in an almost festive and positively friendly mood, and as part of the observance of World Rabies Day, two hundred twenty one rabies vaccinations were administered in a day-long session to cats and dogs of all sizes and shapes. New Mexico law requires cats and dogs at three months of age (or those without documentation of previous rabies vaccination) to begin a rabies vaccination protocol that is required every three years for the rest of their lives after the initial one-year vaccination.

The vaccinations were made available at no cost to pet owners on government assistance and for a reduced cost of five dollars for anyone else who were residents of Dona Ana County. This effort is through the continuing partnerships between the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico, Spay Neuter Action Program and Action Program for Animals initiated last fall. These organizations successfully applied for pharmaceutical grants to receive the vaccines in 2010 and have been conducting similar events throughout the year. The event is one of several conducted by these organizations over the past twelve months to ensure pet owners are complying with state law to protect the public and their pets from a dangerous and almost certain fatal disease.

The rabies vaccination must be administered by a licensed veterinarian and is accompanied by a rabies tag for the pet to wear and a vaccination certificate identifying and attesting to the date, type and expiration of the vaccination, ownership, the identity of the pet and the administering licensed veterinarian. Without these, the pet owner can face a fine, and the pet can be quarantined and even euthanized to test for the disease if rabies is suspected when a bite to a human occurs. Additionally, the bite victim is subjected to serious concerns of contracting the disease and potentially faces a very expensive and unnecessary prevention treatment.

The participating animal welfare organizations want to expressly thank the three local veterinarians, Dr. Elizabeth Carver, Dr. Laura Henckel, and Dr. Jean Wolfgang, who joined with the sponsoring organizations to provide these important vaccinations. The event was conducted in cooperation with the assistance of the staff at the Dona Ana County government building and in particular Public Information Officer Jess Williams, who also serves on the board of directors for the Dona Ana County Humane Society and the Animal Services center of Mesilla Valley. Their assistance and use of the county government site is also greatly appreciated.

For persons missing this event and who may now need their pets vaccinated for rabies more events will be conducted and announced through organization websites and public media. Additional assistance for free rabies vaccination can be obtained by calling the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico Pet Help Line at 575-523-8020.

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.