

On the Positive Side

Doña Ana County animal advocacy experiencing busy time

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by Frank Bryce

Many positive things have occurred in the animal advocacy realm the past few weeks. The Humane Society of Southern New Mexico continues its assistance to Truth or Consequences to develop a new city and county animal shelter. Assistance includes possible provision of several thousands of dollars of veterinary appliances and kenneling to the animal control department of the city to equip and renovate its new location. HSSNM participated recently in the very successful T or C FurFest and provided dozens of microchips to just about every kind, color and size of cat and dog you can imagine from that community and surrounding area. The FurFest was a fundraiser by animal advocacy groups and supporters.

HSSNM also hosted its annual membership meeting at the Ramada Palms Resort and Conference Center to an apparent enthusiastic audience, sharing the past year's success, the hopes and aspirations for the coming year and presenting a special guest speaker from Alley Cat Allies. A dozen folks were recognized as honorees of the year for their extraordinary efforts and longtime support of HSSNM.

Among these were Legacy Honorees MaryIn Zahler and Bill Smith, former HSSNM board members and outstanding longtime advocates for animal welfare; Mayor Ken Miyagishima, Community Collaboration, for his leadership and support for the establishment of the Coalition for Pets and People; and the Sun-News, Community Awareness, for support of the Pets page and this column.

The guest speaker, Rebekah DeHaven, staff attorney with Alley Cat Allies, spent almost a week in Las Cruces with a busy schedule of meetings with city and county animal control department heads, the director and staff of the Animal Service Center of Mesilla Valley, representatives of animal advocacy groups and making a presentation at a Las Cruces City Council work session.

Alley Cat Allies is a quarter-century old organization headquartered in Bethesda, Maryland, that has developed the standards for helping improve and address the issues involving the community cat programs often referred to as "Trap, Neuter, Return" or TNR across the nation.

Rebekah provided the following statement for this column.

"Las Cruces has an active and passionate animal welfare community, and the city has taken many steps in the right direction for its animals. Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) is the only policy that has ever stabilized and reduced community cat populations, which in turn reduces nuisance calls and the number of feral cats entering and being killed in shelters. Individuals and groups doing TNR are providing a public service. But, their impact is stymied by a cumbersome city ordinance and focus on punitive enforcement rather than proactive outreach. The data keeping and best practices outlined in the city ordinance are parts of TNR that should be encouraged, but they should not be barriers to robust TNR taking place. Obstacles to TNR are counterproductive to the goal of reducing the reducing the community cat population, and markers of a policy destined to fail. More than 1700 cats were killed in the shelter last year because they were feral. Las Cruces is working toward eliminating shelter euthanasia for healthy animals, but it will not reach that target with the current policy in place."

It is hoped that this visit by the Alley Cat Allies organization representative will have a positive effect on all the cooperating and collaborating organizations involved in community cat management. The program is new and in fact struggling to grow and flourish. A commitment by all to work together is vitally needed.

Frank Bryce is President of HSSNM. Interested guest authors are invited to contact HSSNM at 575-523-8020.