

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE

COMMENTARY: Working together in the Mesilla Valley

By Mike Hainer

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The Asilomar Accords developed in 2004 by a committed coalition of animal-welfare organizations laid the foundation for collaborative community work to solve pet overpopulation and ending euthanasia of healthy and treatable homeless pets.

One of the tenets of the accords is "the creation of local community coalitions consisting of a variety of organizations (e.g., governmental animal control agencies, nonprofit shelters, grassroots foster-care providers, feral cat groups, funders and veterinary associations) for the purpose of saving the lives of healthy and treatable animals."

Another understanding developed among the varied accord stakeholders is "the belief that no one organization or type of organization can achieve this goal alone, that we need one another, and that the only true solution is to work together. We need to find common ground, put aside our differences and work collaboratively to reach the ultimate goal of ending the euthanasia of healthy and treatable companion animals."

Here at home

In 2008, some fine examples of partnerships for life-saving developed in Doña Ana County. In the spring, the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico opened the weekly Saturday morning Farmers Market dog adoption events in cooperation with the city and community shelter following the decision by the city and county to operate the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley, our community animal shelter. The ASCMV is now operating this great weekly event with the support of many volunteers from the community.

HSSNM also entered into agreement with ASCMV and city in 2008 for adoption of cats from the ASCMV at our local PetSmart Cat Adoption Center operated by HSSNM in partnership with PetSmart Charities. This is another very successful life-saving partnership operated with all volunteer effort and no use of your tax dollars for paid staff.

The Safe Haven Animal Sanctuary also began rescuing dogs from the ASCMV for adoption at SHAS and their adoption events in 2008. Thanks to the city manager and ASCMV staff for leadership in support of these invaluable success stories.

Road to success

Our "best yet" community partnership appears to be the mobile pet spay-and-neuter van operating in outlying areas of our county in the past few months. The county Animal Control staff and their all-volunteer team of Animal Control Reserve officers have used their mobile animal rescue van in collaboration with our local Spay Neuter Action Program to alter dozens of pets in rural areas of our county.

These rural areas are the origin of the majority of the thousands of homeless pets entering our community animal shelter. SNAP coordinates scheduling of the van in each community using all volunteer labor. SNAP also hires the veterinarian, the surgical support technicians, purchases supplies and works with the local community to alter as many animals as possible. Kudos to our

county Sheriff's Department and Doña Ana County leadership for working with SNAP to deliver the very best model for reducing pet overpopulation at the least cost to taxpayers!

Sharing the load

Residents and animals alike benefit when our publicly funded animal services staff partner with local residents and community organizations. These partnerships build goodwill and mutual respect as well as tapping thousands of hours of volunteer time so that the limited public employee time is invested in other valuable work that only they can do.

Later this month the first meeting of the Animal Services Board will convene to begin oversight of both funding and operation of the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley and hopefully continue these collaborative efforts within our community to reduce pet overpopulation and unnecessary waste of our tax dollars.

The inaugural meeting of this new board is a very positive step forward and a great opportunity to expand community partnerships in 2009. Pet overpopulation can only be solved by community-wide coalitions of residents and diverse organizations working together.

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