

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE

COMMENTARY: Progress made on animal welfare, but still a long way to go

By Mike Hainer For the Sun-News

Posted: 11/30/2008 12:00:00 AM MST

In 2007, new state laws outlawed cockfighting and other forms of animal cruelty after years of effort to do so. Thanks to the many community members and legislators who followed the lead of state Sen. Mary Jane Garcia. In May 2007, the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico submitted a proposal for operation of our community animal shelter that included reducing overpopulation through affordable adoptions of altered animals, extended operating hours, use of community veterinarians for services until a full-time veterinarian could be hired, and an increase in funding so that our community shelter could become the most affordable, friendly and convenient place to acquire an altered companion dog or cat.

Since that time, many like-minded citizens have pressed our community leaders for the desperately needed improvements in humane animal treatment in our publicly-funded animal welfare services. Many have stepped up to the challenge in 2008. Our city and county managers forged an agreement for joint operation of the Animal Service Center of the Mesilla Valley.

Under city operation, the ASCMV hired a qualified director and has increased staff in 2008. After 10 months of citizen pressure, a full-time licensed veterinarian will start work in the next month or two.

At a recent public meeting, Beth Vesco-Mock, director of ASCMV, announced the intention to offer affordable spay and neuter services to Doña Ana County residents at "\$10 to \$20 per pet." This remarkable step forward will help reduce pet overpopulation.

Animal Control Services is working to reduce animal cruelty that emerges as neglect when hoarding of animals overwhelms their caregivers. The line has been drawn, and tolerance for animal abuse in Doña Ana County is over. Our elected sheriff has repeatedly acted upon cases of abuse.

In 2008, HSSNM was extended an agreement by the city to operate off-site adoptions at the Farmers Market each Saturday, as well as "LifeSaver" pet adoption events at local businesses. HSSNM re-opened the cat adoption center at PetSmart. Throughout 2008, the Free Spay & Neuter and Spay Neuter Action Program provided for the altering of pets throughout the year. In December 2008, SNAP will provide low-cost spay-and-neuter using a mobile van owned by the taxpayers and managed by the county Animal Control Services. In early 2009, HSSNM hopes to also reach an agreement to use this proven model to offer free spay and neuter services to the areas where the most homeless pets come from. Safe Haven Animal Shelter has begun rescuing dogs from the ASCMV for their regular adoption events at PetSmart, PetCo, and at their sanctuary. Thousand of citizens came forward in 2008 and were welcomed as valued contributors in the campaign against our community pet overpopulation problem.

While all of this is a positive for reducing animal abuse, and reducing the unnecessary killing of homeless pets due to pet overpopulation, the actual numbers continue to tell the truth about our community. In spite of all the positive work, both the number of animals and the percentage of animals being killed at our shelter are increasing. It appears that more than 14,000 cats and dogs will be killed in 2008 using taxpayers' dollars. Some of these animals are injured, ill or at end of

life, but the vast majority are just pets without a home in a community with an out-of-control pet overpopulation problem.

On the positive side, there are many vocal citizens, city and county staff, and elected officials who are dedicated to solving our serious pet overpopulation problem in Doña Ana County. A heartfelt thanks to the many invaluable organizations and their members, for the hundreds of vocal citizens, for our many community leaders, and to our supportive elected officials who have made it clear that progress must continue. The increased killing of homeless pets with taxpayers' dollars, and cases of intentional animal abuse are no longer acceptable in our community. We look forward to all interested citizens, community organizations, and our city, county and state leaders continuing their working together in 2009 to reduce both.

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