

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE

Animal groups working to bring more change

By Curtis S. Childress Sr. For the Sun-News

Posted: 04/05/2009 01:46:31 AM MDT

Doña Ana County is on the verge of change. Animal issues are coming to light and awareness is increasingly visible. From hoarding to dog fighting, cruelty to cock fighting, animals are making the news.

The Doña Ana County Sheriff's Department Animal Control Unit has become pro-active in our approach to these issues. Receiving not only local but also state and national attention, we are the animal control unit in the state.

Our newest addition to taking care of business is the contract between Animal Control and Spay and Neuter Action Program. We have purchased a mobile hospital that is a disaster relief and rescue vehicle. Recently added to the arsenal is a trailer that can house up to 43 animals in the event of a natural disaster, such as the Hatch floods of 2006.

But what do we do with our tools when there is no disaster, no hoarding or fighting of animals and the vehicle is sitting still? We find new ways to put them to good use. One way of doing that is by joining forces, such as with SNAP.

To say we have an overpopulation of animals in the county is an understatement. Spaying and neutering animals adopted out from the local animal shelter by itself will not fix our problem. Where do you think these animals come from? They are strays or unwanted animals picked up by Animal Control in our communities. Since they come from our communities, it makes sense that we attack the over population problem at it's source: In the communities.

Sheriff's Department Animal Control, its reserve officers, SNAP and it's volunteers have been working together to do just that. We've conducted several clinics throughout various communities within the county over the last four months. The clinics provide for low cost, and sometimes free, spay-and-neuter services. Vaccination services are also provided along with educational materials. By going to the source of the problem, people bring in their animals when they would not otherwise drive to the shelter or veterinarian office many miles away. The cost savings and convenience to them is also a plus.

The Sheriff's Department provides the mobile hospital, both Animal Control/Reserves and SNAP provide the workers. SNAP receives public donations to cover costs of supplies and to pay the veterinarians and techs and then clinics are under way. The Humane Society of Southern New Mexico has generously donated \$5,000 this month to help in the continued efforts of this program. By working together we become one step closer to reducing over population. Over time this will result in fewer animals needing to be picked up by Animal Control officers, fewer animals being introduced to the shelter and gets us closer to reaching the goal of "no kill" and unnecessary euthanization.

Curtis S. Childress Sr. is the director of Animal Control/Codes Enforcement of the Doña Ana County Sheriff's Department.