

National no-kill successes show some hope for a positive future

By Michel Meunier For the Sun-News

Posted: 04/12/2009 12:00:00 AM MDT

Our municipal, open-admission animal shelter, which accepts all unwanted animals from the public and those impounded by both city and county animal control departments, took in 15,523 animals in 2008 and put down 10,387 of those animals (66.9 percent).

Although this may seem shocking to some, the numbers are pretty steady compared to previous years. All of this decade, yearly intake at our shelter has been about 15,000 and euthanasia/kill rates from 66.9 percent to 72 percent.

The positive side to this sad story is that we are not alone. Many communities throughout the United States are in a very similar boat. The national average kill rate is about 50 percent, with anywhere from 3 million to 5 million animals put down in shelters each year.

And although many who live here think that our animal-welfare issues are worse than what other communities face, animal neglect, abuse, overpopulation, etc., is a national problem. It is not so much our local culture than human culture as a whole that is responsible for these circumstances.

That said, even more positive news can be found outside of our community.

Each year, more and more no-kill success stories of communities with high kill rates turning things around are surfacing. This gives us hope that these success stories will continue to multiply until our community joins their ranks and until the entire nation is no-kill (the ultimate goal being to save every healthy/treatable animal that enter shelters).

Some highlights of recent success are as follows:

- After hiring director Anne Cavanaugh, the Delaware SPCA went from a 50 percent kill rate in 2007 to a kill rate of 28 percent in 2008. Efforts to reduce the impounding and killing of cats and replacing this with community cat management programs in 2009 are expected to reduce their kill rate even more this year.
- At the Montgomery County Animal Shelter in Texas, Constable Tim Holified was skeptical about no-kill when first approached by his staff. But, for a shelter with a kill rate of 80 percent just three years ago, he figured it couldn't hurt to try the recommendations made by No Kill Solutions when Nathan J. Winograd reviewed the shelter's operations. They already reduced the kill rate to 20 percent, and their save rate is 80 percent (much nicer when the higher percentage is skewed toward lifesaving).
- An ongoing success story is Reno, Nev., a community that is more a match to our own in terms of animal intake (16,000 a year) and area growth. Their no-kill success grew at the hands of Executive Director Bonney Brown, hired a couple of years ago. Reno is saving 90 percent of its homeless dogs and 86 percent of its homeless cats now. Their overall kill rate is 10 percent.

If you'd like to get informed about how animal-welfare systems can turn things around, visit the No Kill Advocacy Center at www.nokilladvocacycenter.org; view recent success stories on The No Kill Nation's forum at www.thenokillnation.com; and get a local perspective from Animal Sheltering ... then and now, my personal no-kill blog, at www.nokillrevolution.blogspot.com.

Michel Meunier serves on the board of Safe Haven Animal Sanctuary, volunteers with SNAP and HSSNM, and is starting a nonprofit called ACTION Programs for Animals (APA).