

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE

Humane work good for the human heart

By Chris Wydra For the Sun-News

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Isn't it amazing how companion animals connect so easily with our hearts and bless us with a special happiness? They become members of our family, encourage our health by walking and are always happy to see us at the end of the day. Well, dogs anyway. They give us unconditional love and a special "safe place" to express our feelings.

Yet this emotional connection is a challenge to some people when working with homeless animals. How many of you think you can never touch a pet without "having" to take it home? That somehow your emotions will shred rational thinking to bits. What about fostering a dog or cat so they'll be good citizens? The special bond you'll develop will make parting sad — but you're well-paid by sending them off to their forever homes.

I'd guess that the longtime core of 20 to 30 local animal volunteers have all had our hearts broken by knowing we can't place them all, seeing some who can't overcome injury or sickness and having to accept our place as a temporary family for them.

But we go on, carried by the only thing they — and we — all need: love and attention.

There are many more bright eyes begging for our touch, meowing for attention and hoping we find adopters. Then your heart expands and you stroke another soft head.

So how about joining us and donating just one month of Saturdays for animal welfare?

Bring a family member and a friend too. We'll find experienced volunteers to work with you, teach you best practices and dry your tears if needed.

The Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley always needs cats and dogs to be socialized and dogs walked for fresh air. Call Dr. Beth Vesco-Mock at (575) 382-0018.

The Animal Action group is establishing a pet food bank so people can afford to feed their pets. They are planning to become a nonprofit soon and promise many more action oriented programs. Call Michele Meunier at (575) 644-0505 and read her no-kill blog online on the Las Cruces Sun-News Web site.

Spay and Neuter Action Program or SNAP is in its 10th year of operation! You can volunteer with the Doña Ana county van they sponsor for surgeries in our vast rural community. The board of directors welcomes help in accounting, answering phones and helping clients in their office at Better Life Pet Food, (575) 524-9265.

Safe Haven Animal Sanctuary/SHAS has run for many years just on volunteer hands and resident contributions. Their facility is off U.S. 70 east with a wide range of animal-interaction opportunities: (575) 541-4942.

The Humane Society of Southern New Mexico works with the Boys and Girls Club under a local chapter of the Jane Goodall Institute's, Roots and Shoots Program where youth learn about humane education. HSSNM also enlists volunteers for cat adoptions at PetSmart condos, holds adoption events and sponsors fundraisers, this year to also benefit SHAS and SNAP. Join HSSNM in raising money for animal programs at this year's second annual "For the HeART of Animals" fundraiser from 5:30 to 11 p.m. June 19 at the Farm and Ranch Museum, (575) 523-8020 or www.hssnm.org for details and to purchase tickets.

We can all schedule four days a month to help one of these groups. The animals will be very grateful and they'll dry your tears so you're ready for more. Let me know how to help: Chris, (575) 373-4507. Thank you for the animals who depend on your kindness.

Chris Wydra is an animal advocate who has fostered countless cats and dogs and worked on behalf of the critters in improving animal welfare in Doña Ana County.