

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE

Commentary: We must become a no-kill community

By Mike Hainer For the Sun-News

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A "No Kill Shelter" for Doña Ana County is now our community goal under the leadership of Dr. Beth Vesco-Mock, DVM, director of that Animal Services Center of Mesilla Valley.

"No kill" means that all healthy and treatable animals are saved rather than killed. Animals with illnesses that cannot be cured or with vicious aggression may lose their life. Shy, scared or defensive behavior and treatable illnesses are not used as an excuse to kill animals.

Nathan Winograd, a nationally recognized authority on no-kill shelters accomplished it with a simple yet highly effective three-step process: 1) Stop the killing; 2) Stop the killing; 3) Stop the killing. Desire to succeed, creativity to come up with solutions, and the flexibility to implement them is required.

Our community recipe would likely include: showcasing available pets each week using all media. Get the word out to churches, clubs, employers and anyone who can help. Enlist every volunteer and advocate possible.

Free and low-cost spay and neuter services must be available. Local veterinarians could conduct rounds in the shelter and participate in year-round low cost voucher programs. Shelter hours must be convenient to increase adoptions and community participation. Off-site adoption and community events must be frequent and regular. Animals from our shelter must be the best bargain in town for companion animals.

Incentives are needed for a hundred or more foster homes for animal rescue, treatment and recovery. Rescue groups must take animals out of our shelter.

Pet retention services like return to owner and positive owner training and counseling must help keep pets from losing a home. Trap, neuter and release of feral cats must begin to control overpopulation.

Compassion, caring, responsible pet care education should expand at schools and community events. Widespread humane education will move our community forward much more rapidly than citation and punishment.

These are community-wide solutions. A no-kill shelter is really a community culture change that just starts at the shelter.

Applaud our city and county leaders for hiring Dr. Beth Vesco-Mock. Respect her for the courage to set this goal in her very first week on the job. Our job as a community is to roll up our sleeves, break out of the past and stop killing animals because we run out of space at the shelter.

The Humane Society of Southern New Mexico strongly supports a no-kill community with our caring volunteers, lifesaving events and community education projects.

You can join our team of volunteers at www.hssnm.org or call 521-3642. Mark your calendars to get tickets and join us at the "For the HeART of Animals" community event on the evening of June 20 at the Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum.

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