

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

Opinion: Group brainstorms to craft animal shelter strategies

By Mike Hainer For the Sun-News

Article Launched: 06/08/2008 12:00:00 AM MDT

Last Thursday, a group of more than 30 animal advocates from Safe Haven Animal Sanctuary, Spay Neuter Action Program, Free Spay Neuter Program, Doña Ana County Humane Society, county Animal Control reserve officers and the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico came together with Director Dr. Beth Vesco-Mock and some of her staff.

Every effort has been made to reduce unnecessary euthanasia of healthy and treatable animals at our shelter, but the number of animals entering still greatly exceeds the number exiting alive. The group brainstormed immediate steps to be taken as well as short and the longer term strategies to reduce the number of animals entering and increase the number of animals leaving alive.

Voluntary surrender of pets by their owners at the shelter must be immediately reduced. Our no-kill community goal is not yet achieved and many of these pets may be euthanized. Volunteers are needed immediately to support many lifesaving activities. Billboards and widespread media coverage regarding spay-and-neuter and the variety of adoptable animals at the center must start now. Daily telephone coverage and visitor reception at the center is needed. Digital posting of adoptable animal photos is an immediate priority for a team of volunteers. Expanding adoption events throughout the county for both dogs and cats requires more volunteers. Our new volunteer coordinator at the center is Maria Chavez, who can be contacted at mchavez.vc@gmail.com. The center is rapidly changing and is now welcoming new and prior volunteers.

On July 1, the city of Las Cruces and Doña Ana County will execute a joint powers agreement to operate the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley under an Animal Welfare Board comprised of elected officials and city or county staff. Our city councilors and county commissioners must adequately fund this board and support the center with the needed personnel and operational support. Our community can not afford to waste our precious tax dollars through further failed management of our shelter. Dedicated community organizations and citizens are adding support and funding for widespread spay and neuter, foster and adoption placements, as well as treatment for adoptable animals.

"For the HeART of Animals" benefit art auction at the Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum on June 20 from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. will raise money to support adoptions, foster care, spay/neuter, vaccinations, community education and other lifesaving work. Collectible artwork, hors d'oeuvres, a no-host bar and soft, live jazz and blues music will be part of this must-attend event. More information is available at www.hssnm.org. Call (575) 521-3642 for tickets.

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