

On the Positive Side: Community key to helping shelter

By Jean Gilbert

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A friend called recently seeking help for a lost dog. He wanted a good outcome without involving authorities or taking the dog to the shelter, but was in a quandary because the dog, described as a beagle-mix, had no tags.

I referred the friend to someone in rescue work, a volunteer long respected for helping orphan beagle and basset hound dogs and dogs from the shelter. Thanks to this help and the friend's diligent efforts, the dog was reunited with his family after a clinic scanned the dog for a microchip and information found was traced.

The friend's pursuit spared the dog tremendous stress and uncertainties, and helped the shelter by not adding another dog to the mix, in a facility dealing with space constraints and manpower distribution concerns.

The friend's efforts helped the shelter in other probable ways: A dog waiting to be reclaimed or adopted had more time left in holding or maybe a space became available for an animal coming in from foster care.

The friend's help was heroic and illustrates how citizens can provide temporary arrangements so the shelter is used only as a last resort for taking animals. This is in sync with our community objective to dramatically increase positive outcomes for animals in reaching no-kill.

The shelter should be the last place to take animals and the first place to look for adoption. We must always steer friends and associates to the shelter to find a companion. We want the shelter to be the preferred place for adoptions because the lives saved now mean more saved later, with fewer animals coming in with spay-neuter adoption requirements.

Other efforts to reach no-kill status include recruitment of friends and family to volunteer on-site and off-site to help with development or expansion of needed lifesaving programs and services for animals and their guardians.

Some of those roles are adoption counseling, match-making and pet retention help. Others include socialization, exercise or playtime with adoptable dogs and cats to relieve stress caused from confinement and to aid them in better showing or display to attract adopters. Community members also need to lobby officials and attend monthly Animal Services Center board meetings for information and involvement.

The majority of people in our community want to reach no-kill sooner than later. The level of volunteerism and participation at our shelter matters a great deal to the animals, in our efforts to reach no-kill and our sense of community pride.

The Humane Society of Southern New Mexico works actively in pet retention efforts and welcomes volunteers to answer calls on their pet help line, (575) 523-8020.

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