

## **On the Positive Side: Opportunities abound for animal lovers in Las Cruces**

**By Elaine Stachera**

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I am still a bit of a city girl. I am an import to southern New Mexico from urban New Jersey, 30 miles from New York City. Before that, I lived in several Chicago neighborhoods - the city proper, not the suburbs, mind you - Hyde Park, Boystown, Rogers Park, and Ravenswood.

I still get a huge charge out of running into people I know when I am out and about in Las Cruces. Back in Jersey or Chicago, if I ran into someone I knew it was a huge coincidence. Now I don't even go to the grocery store without looking halfway decent. Back in Jersey, my best girlfriend lived an hour and a half away by train. Here, I can have friends over after work and still be in bed at a decent hour.

I am not overly romantic about our fair city (well, maybe a little). But after living here for four years, I still find new things and new people to appreciate every day. In particular, the Las Cruces animal welfare community is full of smart and caring people, who I appreciate every single day. The best thing is that it is easy to find a group to work with and find satisfaction in really making a difference in the lives of animals and people.

Animal people exist on a continuum, the same as any other group devoted to a philosophy within a cause. There are those interested in humane education for our young people, or animal therapy and service animals for people with disabilities.

Some animal people are passionate about the humane treatment of animals on factory farms - or the elimination of industrialized animal production. Wildlife protection and rehabilitation, companion animal overpopulation and enforcement of animal welfare laws are on the same continuum. All of these issues are important to making our society a more compassionate place for animals - and people.

Here in Las Cruces, if you have an interest in animals, there is a place for you in the animal welfare community.

Do you want to be hands on, dealing with animals and people? Apply for the county animal control reserve program or volunteer at Safe Haven. Are you administratively savvy? The Spay and Neuter Assistance Program (SNAP) could use your help. Can you raise funds? Help the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico plan its events. Dog walking, cat socialization or fostering an animal your cup of tea? The Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley has plenty of great cats and dogs who need some love while they wait for a forever home.

Want to celebrate a vegetarian lifestyle? Veggie Nite Outers can use your enthusiasm to introduce people to a plant-based diet. Wildlife your thing? The Chihuahuan Desert Wildlife Rescue certainly could use your help. The list goes on.

Opportunities abound in Las Cruces to make a difference in the life of a shelter animal ... or to teach a child compassion for little creatures ... or to work with a dog therapy program for the retirement centers. Get involved. You will feel so good.

Elaine Stachera is a longtime vegetarian and is a member of the county animal control reserve team. Each year she has lived in Cruces she has rescued a street kitty. There is no more room at the inn. Please spay and neuter your animals.