

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

Public/private cooperation is the answer

By Mike Hainer For the Sun-News

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This last week, the Doña Ana County Commission hosted a community workshop for citizen participation in developing the joint powers agreement between the city and county for operation of the Animal Service Center of the Mesilla Valley, our community animal shelter.

Our serious pet overpopulation problem in Doña Ana County will not be resolved by government alone. Citizen participation is critical. Our past "catch and kill" policy will become far too expensive, and will not curtail the rapid growth in homeless animals. Let us hope the appointed representatives from the city and county will have the wisdom to engage the many citizens and animal advocacy organizations in our community to join them in ending our pet overpopulation and reducing the cost of unnecessary killing of healthy and treatable companion animals.

Pets abandoned at our shelter each day and the homeless animals caught by our animal control officers come from several sources. Litters from family pets, backyard breeders, puppy and kitten mills and animal hoarders all contribute to the overpopulation. They all cry foul when singled out. We must address each or we will be forever killing more and more healthy and treatable animals. If we really want to stop the killing, then we must stop the out-of-control breeding that is the source of the problem. Few people understand that the miracle of litters of cute puppies or kittens now translates into animal homelessness followed by needless death. The truth is a bitter pill.

The solutions that have proven effective in many communities involve rapid and widespread spay and neuter of unaltered pets. Our community shelter must become the most convenient source of companion animals at the very best price. Otherwise people wanting pets will get unaltered or unvaccinated pets elsewhere. Breeding of animals must be limited to a few individuals who are required to contribute to solving our pet overpopulation problem. This is a new direction for our tax dollars.

No government has been successful in solving the community problem on their own. This challenge can only be met by a working coalition of people and organizations. Kudos to the county commission for hosting the community discussion this last week. If this is the beginning of county leaders working with the community, then we have a hope of ending the rapidly increasing cost of "catch and kill" of healthy and treatable animals that wind up at our shelter.

Visit us online at www.hssnm.org or call (575) 521-3642.

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