

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE

Opinion: Saving our animals in the Mesilla Valley

By Mike Hainer For the Sun-News

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What does a no-kill animal shelter mean? One where the number of animals getting out alive is 90 percent of the animals going in? One where disabled and elderly animals are not killed because of poor adoptability? One where people are passionate about saving the lives of healthy and treatable animals? A shelter where only the most vicious, ill and injured animals are killed?

Our city and county operate an "open admission" animal shelter called the Animal Service Center of the Mesilla Valley. This means that our shelter is required to admit all animals dropped off by animal control and citizens. That's more than 19,000 animals in 2008 if we keep up our catch-and-kill policies and allow citizen drop-offs to prevent animal dumping in our community. Are we passionate about saving lives when 60 percent of the admitted animals or more are killed to make space for the daily inflow of animals? More animals getting out of our shelter alive means widespread spay and neuter of companion animals and ending backyard breeding and puppy mills. Saving the lives of healthy and treatable companion animals in our community means that all public leaders support replacement of our costly catch and kill practices. More progress is needed for our team of shelter staff to sustain a real passion for saving lives. Strong leadership outside of our shelter is desperately needed.

On the positive side, our leaders are slowly stepping forward. State Sen. Mary Jane Garcia fought ridicule for years to stop animal cruelty in southern New Mexico. The Las Cruces City Council proclaimed August 2008 as the Wall of Hope Month in memorial to 12,000 animals who lose their lives at our shelter each year. The county sheriff has initiated an Animal Control Reserve staff to help move toward more humane services to homeless or abused animals. This is a good start in our quest toward a compassionate community that stops the waste of both tax money and lives of healthy and treatable animals.

Get informed by going to Las Cruces' newest animal welfare forum on our Animal Sheltering Revolution blog. Get involved in spirit, or in deed by attending the annual meeting for the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico, this Thursday at 6:30 p.m. at our new offices at 403 S. Melendres in Las Cruces. Ray Powell, former land commissioner of New Mexico, is our guest speaker. The public is invited to attend and have a good time. Go to www.hssnm.org for more information.

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

- To read the Animal Sheltering Revolution blog, go to <http://nokillrevolution.blogspot.com>