

On the Positive Side: Amazing Results in Albuquerque Animal Shelter by Frank Bryce February 17, 2012

Usually our "On the Positive Side" articles involving animal welfare focus on the truly positive events and happenings in Las Cruces and Doña Ana County. These involve incidents with both private individuals and organizations that address a wide array of problems we face locally and the often almost heroic efforts by our neighbors to resolve them. Recently, a story was published that deserves our attention and appreciation.

Albuquerque, our neighbor to the north, recorded an amazing and dramatic reduction in their animal shelter euthanasia rate as reported in their local newspaper. The cat euthanasia number fell by a jaw-dropping 32 per cent for 2011 over the 2010 number. Amazingly, cat adoptions soared with almost the same numbers. This was in spite of intake numbers increasing during that time. Barbara Bruin, Albuquerque's animal welfare director, stated in the article that "for too long cats were second class citizens. We've instituted some things that have saved lives."

After long struggling itself for some years, Albuquerque has made very impressive steps to raise the standards of their animal welfare efforts and appear to have succeeded in recent years. This success continues to be demonstrated and carried forward with this current report. Apparently, the cat euthanasia rate of 72 percent recorded five years ago has now been cut in half to 36 per cent. Cats in shelters often suffer respiratory illnesses that make them especially susceptible to high euthanasia rates and Albuquerque has increased its efforts to keep the cats healthier and better socialized. This in turn reduces spreading infectious diseases and makes cats more adoptable.

While not as dramatic, the Albuquerque numbers for dogs have steadily improved also with a five per cent reduction in the euthanasia rate and a nine per cent adoption rate increase.

Barbara attributes their success to the hard work of staff, volunteers, and rescue groups along with those folks who adopt animals from the shelter but it is also very obvious the leadership and management by Barbara herself has been instrumental in the shelter's changeover.

Much of the efforts described by the Albuquerque shelter mirror what is developing in our area. Increasing spaying and neutering and adding identification of animals is especially important to reducing the number of animals flowing into our shelter, a point expressed by Barbara as to the finite number of adoptive homes that are available. Continuing improvements of Albuquerque shelter facilities make these facilities more inviting for the public to seek companion animals and increased marketing efforts help also. The developing coalition of animal welfare groups locally is working hard to institute the strategies of Albuquerque. Hopefully, we will see similar results from our efforts here at home soon.

Frank Bryce is President of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico. Interested guest authors can contact HSSNM at 523-8020.