

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

On the positive side

By Donna Eichstadt / For the Sun-News

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Do you like dogs? Do you like to walk? Are you in good health? Would you like to knock off a few pounds? Do you have spare time each week?

If you answer "yes" to these questions, you're a likely candidate to be a volunteer dog walker at the animal shelter, also known as the Animal Services Center of Mesilla Valley. Not only would you be doing a good thing for yourself, but you would be helping out some very sweet dogs at the shelter and could be saving the life of a companion that simply needs some exercise, socialization and attention. The effort on your part is a win-win for the dog, for you, for the shelter and the community.

Dogs awaiting adoption at the animal shelter live essentially 24/7 in about a 15-square-foot kennel. This is pretty much the very minimum space recommended for large breeds and due to the pet overpopulation handled at the shelter they are very often required to share that space with one or more other dogs. Recommendations for dogs in these more crowded shelter situations are to walk the dogs twice each day for 20 minutes.

Some "long-term" residents of the shelter can lose social skills, become less easily handled and present a much less adoptable image if not given the opportunity for such an important activity, almost like a human continuously bound in a straight jacket. Many are young and energetic and need what we all need - companionship and exercise.

They don't ask you for much-mainly loving walks with a volunteer on the trails at the shelter while they wait for their new forever home. That is where the volunteer dog walkers come to the rescue and make a positive change in the dogs' lives.

If you feel you have always wanted to help animals, this is the time! Apply to walk dogs or help in many other ways at the shelter, and in so doing, you can not only give a measure of joy to the many dogs there awaiting adoption but increase the likelihood they will be adopted.

Jordan Simons, the shelter volunteer coordinator, or one of the shelter staff will train you and believe me, the dogs will appreciate it! So get a buddy and stop by at the Animal Services Center of Mesilla Valley between noon and 6 p.m. on weekdays and noon and 5 p.m. on weekends and apply to be a dog walker. It's a win-win situation so badly needed ... so do it today!

The Animal Services Center is located at 3551 Bataan Memorial West, off U.S. 70. For general information, call 382-0018.

For information regarding volunteer orientation and training, call the volunteer coordinator Jordan Simons at 382-0018, Ext. 119. Information regarding programs and services can also be found on the shelter Web site at www.ascmv.org.

Photos and descriptions of shelter/ASCMV animals needing homes can also be found on the Pals4Pets Web site at www.pals4pets.info

Donna Eichstaedt is a volunteer at the Animal Services Center of Mesilla Valley. She serves on the Strategic Planning Committee, walks adoptable dogs and helps at off-site and other adoption events. She and husband, Carl, also a shelter dog walker, own Red Sky Farm in Las Cruces.