

On the Positive Side: A Comprehensive, Community-wide Strategy

by Frank Bryce

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In another very positive step, an animal welfare comprehensive community-wide strategy is being developed and instituted in Doña Ana County. At a January 7, 2012 meeting, participants from organizations and agencies as well as concerned citizens unanimously endorsed a collaborative effort to reduce pet euthanasia in Doña Ana County. On Tuesday of this past week, Tom Townsend, co-chair for the group, presented an over-view of the burgeoning proposal of the "Coalition for Pets and People" to the Animal Services Center of Mesilla Valley (ASCMV) Board of Directors at a work session. This proposal sets forth the coalition's plan for increasing public health and safety, enhancing animal welfare, and increasing the effectiveness of public expenditures. The "Coalition for Pets and People" presentation advocated for a resolution in support of reducing euthanasia at the ASCMV shelter to be considered for a vote by the ASCMV Board at an upcoming regularly scheduled meeting.

The presentation effectively discussed how the current animal welfare system results in the premature deaths of thousands of animals, how the situation can be corrected and how the accomplishment of the coalition's objectives requires participation by animal advocates, Animal Control Department officers and the ASCMV. Requiring investment of time and fiscal resources beyond current levels, the effort may take as long as seven years to see anticipated results. Hence the objective "Zero in Seven" to reach the goal of a shelter save rate of animals at 95 percent. The killing of healthy and treatable cats and dogs would be actually reduced to zero by 2019 or sooner.

Reviewing successful programs from around the nation, it is recognized that three categories of effort emerge as a twelve point plan. First is building a strong support base with compassionate and resourceful leadership throughout the shelter and animal control functions, providing adequate and effective funding for all aspects of the effort, gaining community involvement and engaging volunteers. Next is lowering the intake of animals by increased pet retention by owners, increased return of lost animals, available high-volume, low cost pet sterilization and a feral and free roaming cat program. Finally, there is the need for increasing the number of animals leaving the shelter through medical and behavioral programs, rescue organizations, foster homes and comprehensive adoption efforts.

Townsend stated candidly there are three assumptions that underlie the twelve point plan. Owners must accept their responsibilities and be accountable for their pets. The pet population must more closely reflect the availability of homes for the cats and dogs. The unintended consequence of high euthanasia numbers must be minimized through public policy and enforcement activity keeping in mind public health and safety.

Everyone is reminded to watch for the "Zero in 7" logo at community business sponsors and encouraged to participate in the Coalition events and activities to support this important effort.

Frank Bryce is President of Humane Society of Southern New Mexico. Interested guest authors can contact HSSNM at 575-523-8020.