

**ON THE POSITIVE SIDE**

**New facility to hold animals in legal proceedings**

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**by Frank Bryce**

A ribbon-cutting earlier this month for a new Doña Ana County Court Hold Animal Facility at the Doña Ana Animal Control facilities on East Griggs Avenue gave participants a first-hand look at the over 7,200 square feet of cat and dog kennels, office space and veterinary medical service areas. The facility will hold animals seized in cruelty, abuse and hoarding cases. The legal process often requires months or even years to adjudicate and the new facility offers a safer facility for these animals.

The \$1.1 million facility replaces the antiquated and inadequate facility being used adjacent to the Southern New Mexico State Fair and Rodeo grounds. In a special bond election voters provided \$800,000 toward the new facility in 2013; \$150,000 was provided through legislative appropriation; and the Doña Ana County Facilities and Parks Department added the remaining \$150,000 needed to complete all stages.

The new climate-controlled environment offers safety for animals and staff of a modern shelter for a unique set of law enforcement situations. Due to its unique status and purpose for live animal evidentiary holding, the facility will not be open to the public. With the conclusion of successful prosecutions, animal owners will be billed the costs associated with the care and maintenance of the animals.

Speakers at the ribbon-cutting — including County Manager Julia Brown, Deputy Sheriff Eddie Lerma, Animal Cruelty Coordinator Curtis Childress and Public Information Officer Jess Williams — all stressed the importance of humane treatment of animals and pet owner responsibility. This new facility is a positive step by Doña Ana County officials to demonstrate their commitment to that effort.

Childress in his remarks recognized and thanked Maryln Zahler, director emeritus of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico, for her efforts in supporting the initial efforts in the development of the new facility. Zahler was the original animal control officer volunteer coordinator and helped oversee many of the volunteers who helped take care of court-hold animals at the fairgrounds. Zahler held special deputy's status with the Doña Ana County Sheriff's department for many years.

HSSNM was recently notified that Animal Protection of New Mexico has selected Zahler to receive the "Mary Jane Garcia Champion of Animals" Milagro Award. The award recognizes exceptional leadership, courage and persistence in the face of opposition, resulting in positive change for animals. Zahler has worked for well over a dozen years directly and indirectly with animal welfare issues that have plagued Las Cruces, Doña Ana County and quite literally the state of New Mexico.

She has been an outstanding champion and warrior in the struggle to improve, promote and advocate for the highest level of humane care for companion pets and animals. With her continuing efforts and her role in the initial development of the current association of the Coalition for Pets and People, the southern New Mexico low-cost, high-volume spay and neuter and microchipping programs are at the highest operating levels ever. Zahler is most deserving of this award and recognition.

Thank you, Maryln.

*Frank Bryce is president of HSSNM. Interested guest authors can call HSSNM at 575-523-8020*