

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE

**Cat colony management effort makes progress **

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by Frank Bryce

On June 22, at the request of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico, or HSSNM, the Las Cruces City Council held a work session to update the status of the Community Cat Colony Management Program and its implementation.

HSSNM board member Emile Bordet provided HSSNM's plan for assisting existing informal cat colony sites in the city to come into compliance with the recently passed city ordinance and voiced concern over some differences between the city ordinance and that of the Doa Ana County program.

Some positive progress was noted coming from earlier meetings with representatives of the Coalition for Pets and People, HSSNM, Las Cruces Police Department and city Animal Control to reach agreement on the protocols and procedures to be used to meet compliance by the cat colony sites.

There was some history provided by James Chavez, chief of city Codes and Animal Control Department, in which he described the two- to three- year time frame it has taken to get the new ordinance language adopted. Bordet discussed what appears to be micromanagement by the Las Cruces Animal Control Department described by Chavez as an attempt by Animal Control having "decided to do what other agencies are refusing to do to actually deal with this head-on." Chavez stated no other state or apparently national agency or organization has required a permitting system and requirements as proscribed by his department.

Sharing comments were Dr. Beth Vesco-Mock, director of the Animal Service Center of the Mesilla Valley, who stated the requirements for compliance except ear-tipping would be very traumatic for those individual cats and an added unnecessary cost to colonies with limited resources. The requirement for photographing each cat colony seemed excessive. The director also discussed the serious issue of lack of trust by colony managers with Animal Control and the ambiguity of the ordinance language and possible availability of the use of variances to meet some colony compliance issues.

The director stated the need to work on the trust factor and assure participants Animal Control was "not going to swoop up all the cats and kill them."

The director firmly stated that the program needed to move forward and encouraged participation by cat colony sites. City attorney Marcy Driggers said she understood that the Animal Control would work with participants to provide variances written into the permits and city councilors recommended this language be specifically provided as written policy.

City Manager Robert Garza stated the police department has a "standing orders" mechanism that could be used to provide specific and unequivocal language to address this concern. Noted author Denise Chavez firmly added her support for the program as the first and only city community cat colony manager to be registered with Animal Control. She touted the success of her own efforts to manage her colony but did recognize the expense of some city requirements, the lack of trust on the part of colony site managers and their fear to come forth and the desperate need to work together to resolve the problem.

She encouraged those with cat colonies to come forward and not be afraid.

In a very positive and generous gesture, she offered to be a resource and consultant for the program.

HSSNM has some funding designated for assistance to spay and neuter community cats and provide other assistance as needed. To get information, call 575-523-8020 so we can work together.

Frank Bryce is president of HSSNM. Guest authors can contact HSSNM at 575-523-8020.