

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

On the Positive Side

Guidelines to raise the bar for New Mexico animal shelters

By Frank Bryce for the Sun-News

The board of directors of the Animal Service Center of Mesilla Valley, our government-operated animal shelter, took a positive step forward at its recent meeting to finalize a resolution and to adopt the "Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters" at their next meeting.

This is a publication by the association of Shelter Veterinarians. When the resolution is rewritten as proposed and officially adopted next month, these guidelines will provide criteria to assess and determine the effectiveness and needs of our government shelter operation. As stated in the publication's introduction, the guidelines are essentially the result of a two-year effort by an "international organization whose mission is to improve the health and well-being of animals in shelters through the advancement of shelter medicine. Every attempt was made to balance animal welfare science with practical and realistic recommendations specific for shelters. The guiding principal was always animals' needs, which remain the same regardless of the mission of an organization or the challenges involved in meeting those needs."

The ASCMV board had a lively discussion about the existence of other sets of earlier shelter guidelines from various sources, as to which would be adopted and why. The need for adoption of the guidelines became apparent as the discussion brought forth explanations about varying jurisdictions. The Las Cruces Animal Control Department does weekly shelter inspections that only pertain to the city ordinances and the New Mexico Veterinary Medical Board facility licensing inspection, annually or bi-annually, is only for the medical facility of the shelter. Some board members were unaware that such Animal Control Department inspections were being done. Some did not understand that the New Mexico Veterinary Medical Board medical facility license was not a shelter operation inspection or operational guidelines outside the medical facility itself. Adoption of the "Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters" will bridge the gaps we now have in assessing shelter operation.

These guidelines can arguably be said to set a high bar to which many shelters cannot reach for many reasons, but adoption of the guidelines sets the goal and requires explanation and alternatives for not reaching the bar. Our shelter has not had such an official direction in the past and now we are accepting the responsibility for its accomplishment.

Frank Bryce is president of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico. Interested guest authors for "On the Positive Side" can contact HSSNM at (575) 523-8020.