

On the Positive Side: Animal control departments take big step toward saving pets' lives

By Jake Sims / For the Sun-News

Posted: 11/16/2012 04:20:59 AM MST

The Doña Ana County and Las Cruces animal control departments announced an expanded effort to return animals home quickly and safely while reducing costs to the communities for the local animal shelter operation. There has been some thought for some time that it could be possible to significantly reduce shelter intake by giving the officers in the field the capability to identify pets owners prior to transport to the shelter. This idea was given some validity when a program in Calgary, Canada came to light that returns about 30 percent of the animals picked up each year by their animal control trucks without taking the animals to their shelter. Proponents of this plan have been urging it's implementation here since learning about it over two years ago.

That effort is now being implemented through the cooperative and collaborative efforts of the Las Cruces Police Department and the Doña Ana County Sheriff's Department along with the Coalition for Pets and People. This is one of the projects under taken by the coalition representing animal advocacy organizations working on a wide range of efforts to address the pet overpopulation here.

Laptop computers and air cards valued at well over \$7,000 have been provided to the Las Cruces and Doña Ana County animal control for use on animal control vehicles. Emile Bourdet, coalition Terrier Team leader and member of the Shepherd Team stated, "When operational, with these computers the animal control officer can access a central data base to determine the owner of a micro-chipped animal and return it to its home."

Until now micro-chipped cats and dogs had to be taken to the shelter under most conditions before they could be scanned for a micro-chip and returned to their owners. This increases the work load on animal control officers, particularly those serving the county outlying areas, adds to the cost of the operation of the shelter, and exposes the animal to disease and additional stress unnecessarily.

The initial reports concerning this program are promising even as the equipment is being put on line. The success of the micro-chip identification and subsequent return of the pet has been documented many, many times here as several animal advocate organizations and all the veterinary clinics have micro-chip scanners and are often called upon by wonderful private rescuers seeking assistance to return the dog or cat home. With this new animal control effort, those micro-chipped animals not fortunate enough to be taken in by Good Samaritans and be picked up by animal control will now have an additional resource to help them home quickly.

To achieve a successful "return from trucks" program, we all must be sure to have our pets micro chipped. The coalition has plans for micro-chipping events to provide opportunity for pet owners to have pets micro-chipped. These efforts will contribute significantly to reducing the killing of healthy and treatable animals at our local animal shelter. You can also assist this effort by joining the coalition effort, volunteering with the animal advocacy organizations that need your help and donating to these efforts. For more information, you can visit zeroin7.org.

Jake Sims is facilitator for Animal Welfare and Education (AWARE) to improve the lives of animals and people through advocacy, education and support. Guest authors can contact Humane Society of Southern New Mexico at (575) 523-8020.