

## **On the Positive Side: Sharing successful strategies from El Paso**

**by Frank Bryce**

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At the annual meeting of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico, Kurt Fenstermacher, interim director of the El Paso Animal Shelter, shared the successful results of a Task Force Assessment effort in El Paso. The task force was initiated in July 2015 because the shelter experienced "a regular flow of individuals and groups routinely complaining about Animal Services' actions and operations."

The task force's purpose was to address decades of a failing policy for the shelter operation, and to make recommendations for improvement through an examination of existing shelter practices.

At its inception several years ago here in Doña Ana County and Las Cruces, the Coalition for Pets and People and its collaborative organizations adopted all of the best practices of no-kill shelters the task force report found lacking in El Paso. The difference in the success being made in El Paso in the past year and a half, versus our slower progress, appears to be support from the El Paso City Council to the task force recommendations. The task force's report says dynamic leadership drives and sustains meaningful changes.

The task force visited community animal shelters that changed their operations dramatically by adopting best practices that resulted in a live outcome rate above 90 percent. Fenstermacher stressed that half-hearted attempts at the program will not be effective, and the key components all must be aggressively implemented. Essentially, all of components identified in the task force report are goals of our own Coalition for Pets and People, but lack the aggressive, committed and combined support being provided in El Paso.

The abbreviated list of the best practices includes a community cat program known as Trap, Neuter, Return to humanely reduce the feral cat population; low cost or no cost, high volume spay/ neuter programs to reduce shelter intake; partnering with rescue groups and foster care to drastically expand shelter capacity; and coordinated efforts to encourage community adoptions. Many of the reasons people surrender their animals are preventable. A key shelter responsibility is to ensure the health and wellbeing of its animals. Community support is another key to shelter success. Lifesaving efforts cannot succeed without volunteers. Up to 65 percent of roaming animals are returned to their owners without ever being taken to the shelter.

These components are recognized locally and have been somewhat addressed, but the real story is the manner these are being implemented by the El Paso Animal Shelter, its leadership and aggressive city council support. At a Las Cruces City Council workshop scheduled for 1 p.m. Monday, Dec. 12, Fenstermacher will present the task force report to the council. Our animal control and shelter operations differ from El Paso, but the goals are the same and we can learn a great deal from the El Paso program.

If you are interested in helping support and resolve this issue, please plan on attending this important work session.

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