

On the Positive Side: Two steps in the right direction for animals

By Frank Bryce

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The Humane Society of Southern New Mexico is extremely happy to report that the Doña Ana County Animal Control Department is going great guns on returning animals to the pet owners from animal control trucks, without ever having to take the animals to the shelter. As it was reported in October, the county animal control returned 105 animals. In November, it has reported returning 178 animals. That is an estimated savings of about \$60,845 to the county and city animal control and animal shelter efforts.

The Las Cruces animal control department, with less than 100 animals being returned from the trucks, has not been as successful, but has still saved about \$21,000. It is anticipated the number returned from the Las Cruces city animal control trucks will continue to improve with time.

HSSNM, partnering with the Coalition for Pets and People, was instrumental in assisting both city and county animal control departments to acquire micro-chip scanners, laptop computers and air cards to implement the program.

Cooperating organizations have been pushing hard to provide donation. It has held micro-chipping events throughout the county and Las Cruces to expand the programs as fast and as widely as possible. It was reported to the Board of County Commissioners at the Dec. 10 regular commissioners' meeting that not bringing animals from outlying areas of the county to the shelter was dramatically saving time and transportation costs. It is important that micro-chipping be done for your pets. It is one of the safest and most economical methods to assist your pet being returned home to you in as short a time as possible.

Not only can this save your pet a trip to the animal shelter, but it saves the private pet owner money, allows more space at our overcrowded shelter for other pets to survive, provides the opportunity for better medical care for the animals at the shelter, and decreases disease exposure for the animals involved at every step.

On another very bright note, the Doña Ana County Commissioners voted unanimously to approve the ordinance to amend the county by deleting and repealing the current Chapter 134 Animals, and replacing it with a new Chapter 134 Animals.

In development for several years— and more recently with intensified efforts— the new Chapter 134 is an attempt to more closely align county and city ordinances, clarify definitions and address changes in animal control concerns that have developed since the last revision.

The discussion highlighted concerns about the decriminalization of colony cat care and the overriding agreement that current trap and kill efforts for what are described as feral cats simply does not work. The thousands of cats that have been killed at our animal shelter over the past five years is a staggering testament to that fact.

The Board of Commissioner's Chair Billy Garrett recognized the problem in a nutshell as over-population and the solution as reduction with sterilization, vaccination and micro-chipping. Through colony cat program management, it will begin to address public safety, wildlife predation, nuisance complaints and cat health issues which exist now. The cat colony program still faces development of protocols and the ordinance section does not relieve private persons and animal control departments involved of their responsibilities. It does, however, allow the flexibility to openly and responsibly manage the problem in a new and promising manner. Kudos to the animal control departments and their officers along with the Board of County Commissioners for their efforts in both of these issues.

Frank Bryce is President of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico. Interested guest authors can contact HSSNM at 575-523-8020.