

On the Positive Side: Micro-chipping pets: This plan is coming together

By Frank Bryce / For the Sun-News

Posted: 12/14/2012 02:50:18 AM MST

About two years ago, the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico (HSSNM) learned of a program in Calgary, Canada. This program appeared an exciting possible adjunct to help solve our problem of overcrowding at the Animal Service Center of Mesilla Valley (ASCMV) and resulting high kill rate at our shelter for lack of space and available care for healthy and treatable animals. As has been noted in several articles since broaching this idea, the Calgary animal control department returns about 30 per cent of the dogs and cats they pick up as strays to the animals' homes without taking them to their animal shelter.

This would be a tremendous savings to our county and city budgets along with reducing the tremendous work load at the shelter and help eliminate the exposure to disease and stress for many animals. Only recently it was reported that our local city and county animal control vehicles had been successfully outfitted with about \$7,000 worth of laptops, micro-chip scanners and air cards required to operate a similar program here.

The success of such a program is obviously dependent on several aspects including the equipment mentioned, the will of the animal control officers to use the equipment and the communication process required among all involved. The animal control departments have the equipment and have begun to demonstrate their will and ability to use these tools with an increase in the number of animals being returned home off the trucks already. This is starting to work well within the city animal control department while the county animal control still needs further development of a communication system with their information technology department. This is in rapid development hopefully.

A key aspect to the program's success is the proper identification of as many animals as possible when they are picked up by animal control officers. This can be done by the rabies tag, the city license tag, and a micro-chip. Eventually, even digital photographs can be incorporated into this return and retrieval system but until then tags and micro-chips are imperative.

Micro-chips are the most reliable form of pet identification as tags can be removed or lost but not the micro-chip. In recent months, the HSSNM has vigorously pursued, along with members of the Coalition for Pets and People (CPP), the availability of micro-chips from our local shelter. After much discussion and negotiation, last Thursday, the ASCMV Board of Directors passed a resolution where 501(c)(3) non-profit animal welfare organizations can receive micro-chips for use in the field to increase pet identification exponentially. These micro-chips will be available to interested and supporting organizations at cost plus a modest administrative fee. The micro-chip procedures to be followed are set forth by the ASCMV resolution and described in the ASCMV policy manual to insure proper handling and registration.

HSSNM picked up 75 micro-chip units and paperwork last Friday and at the Dec. 10 Chaparral Spay and Neuter implanted 24 micro-chips in 23 dogs and one cat. The enthusiasm with which this micro-chip aspect of Chaparral's spay and neuter grant program was received was absolutely euphoric. The participants donated enough funds to cover the costs of the chips. Implanting of the micro-chip while the animals were recovering from surgical procedures made the process painless and simple.

This is an important advance in addressing our local animal welfare issues and everyone involved is to be commended for tackling a new way of doing business that works for everybody. You are again encouraged to get your pets micro-chipped wherever you can to help make this new effort a success.

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