

## **ON THE POSITIVE SIDE**

### **County animal control focuses on outreach**

**By Frank Bryce**

**Special to the Sun-News**

**Dec. 26, 2014**

During this time of year, we often realize and appreciate the contributions made by those who have helped throughout the year in many ways that often go less noticed.

Being involved with animal advocacy as part of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico (HSSNM), we get to see many examples of the hard work by agencies often saddled with the harder aspects of protecting the public and insuring the welfare of dogs, cats and other pets and animals.

At a recent Coalition for Pets and People board meeting, participants were provided with an update about the education efforts of the Doña Ana County Sheriff's Department Animal Control and Codes Enforcement departments.

What meeting attendants learned was that, in partnership with the Animal Cruelty Task Force, Planning and Zoning and Vector Control divisions, the animal control and codes enforcement officers have gone door-to-door throughout county communities, offering education for residents on how to clean up their neighborhoods and properly care for their animals.

In a year-long span, the canvassing project, called Animal Control Environmental Survey (ACES), saw teams of county departments canvass 18 area communities, identifying issues and explaining about weed and pest control, animal ordinances and other issues. Through ACES, the county plans to canvas 14 more communities in the next year.

Through this effort, to date, 2,329 homes have been visited, with 1,254 residences found in violation of a county ordinance yielding 617 written warnings and 637 verbal warnings.

The effort behind the project is to explain violations and gain compliance for community improvement.

Agencies invested 348 days into the project for a combined total of 2,488 hours.

"The projects aim to reach out to the community to offer suggestions on how residents can come into compliance with county ordinances and beautify the area where they live," reads a memo from the sheriff's office.

Going into the public schools throughout the county, the animal control, codes enforcement and Cruelty Task Force have monthly offered educational presentations to third and fourth grade students.

During the presentations, the students learn about pet care and maintenance, pet socialization, bite prevention, recycling and illegal dumping. The presenters utilize a variety of prizes and pet toys to increase participation and awareness.

During this time period, the officers provided education programs and events in 18 schools, spending a total of 64 days — 292.5 hours — in the schools. They visited with an estimated 16,838 students and educators.

Reducing cases of animal neglect, abuse and cruelty is directly correlated with reducing family violence, making this education outreach an important and critical aspect of the department's efforts.

Saving the lives of animals actually does relate to saving the lives, in many ways, of those with pets in their homes.

In addition to their regular duties and community outreach projects, the county is working closely with animal advocacy groups to document areas most in need of spay and neuter services, returning animals using the micro- chip

scans and collaborating to develop policies and support to address animal control issues in the most effective and compassionate manner. That is the spirit they must carry all year.

Frank Bryce is president of HSSNM. Interested guest authors can call HSSNM at 575-523-8020.