

On the Positive Side: Shelters adopt new standards

By Dr. Judy Long For the Sun-News

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Las Cruces is fortunate in having a strong network of groups and individuals committed to animal welfare. We are familiar with the paid professionals of Animal Control, and equally with volunteer organizations whose names are known to the public.

We know, too, the anonymous, committed individuals who rescue, foster, neuter and feed homeless and abused animals. The fabric they weave is occasionally lumpy, but it is strong.

Understandably, the Animal Services Center is one of the most visible of the animal welfare agencies. It is officially overseen by a joint city/county commission and unofficially, by many citizens who have a stake in "the pound," as it was once called.

Today, volunteers can contribute attention and stimulation to the animals housed at the ASC. Active adoption programs mean that the ASC need not be the end of the line for all the animals that pass through. And always, there is room for improvement.

Consequently, it is good news that this week the Association of Shelter Veterinarians released new Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters. Concerns raised by members of the ASV in person, by e-mail, and through the ASV list-serve helped to identify some of the key issues that were addressed in the guidelines.

Drawing from the professional literature and a broad experience base, the Association of Shelter Veterinarians outlined what is needed to meet the minimum basic needs of companion animals living in population settings. Thousands of hours of work went into researching, assembling, reviewing, and editing the final content. Special effort was made to ensure that the recommendations are relevant for all shelters while still being achievable.

Making the information widely available means that communities like ours can have a solid basis for discussing and evaluating standards of care at our shelter.

The guidelines are not intended as an operational document; rather they are intended to assist shelters as they develop and implement protocols that impact animal care and well-being. Recognizing that there are many ways to meet the basic needs of animals, the recommendations are performance-based and not overly prescriptive. Additional recommendations and suggestions for ideal practices are provided where relevant.

The overriding consideration throughout the development of these guidelines has been the well-being of shelter animals. The guidelines present a positive tool for shelters and communities to review animal care, identify areas that need improvement, allocate resources, and implement solutions. The goals are to optimize welfare, minimize euthanasia, and prevent suffering. The more widespread the publicity for this resource, the more informed our policies can be.

For a detailed reading, readers can open the links below and receive a copy. The complete document can also be accessed from the organization's website www.sheltervet.org.

Animal welfare groups wishing to place a link to the guidelines on their websites can use the ASV Shelter Standards button at the link above. Comments and questions can be sent to shelterstandards@sheltervet.org.

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