



Two cats reach out to get the attention of visitors to PetSmart, where the newly formed coalition helped set up cat adoptions seven days a week.

Partnership aims to save more than 9 Lives

The new No Kill Community Coalition bands together for animal welfare

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Put animal rights groups, breeders, pet lovers and the Lane County Animal Regulation Authority into a room, and one might expect the factions to fight like cats and dogs.

But the No Kill Community Coalition - which formed in August with the mission of ending the euthanasia of adoptable animals in area shelters - seemingly has overcome animal instincts to help four-legged residents in the county stay alive.

Inspired by a July visit from national no-kill pioneer Nathan Winograd, the coalition has provided common ground and a reinvigoration to the area's already passionate animal activists, said Sylvia Calderwood, coalition publicity chairwoman.

"It's a really amazing time because these people are coming together and putting aside their differences," coalition member Julie McDonnell said.

"If people can set that aside long-term, a really great change can come about."

In the four months since the coalition's first meeting, members have moved quickly to launch several programs they hope will stem the rapid growth of the unwanted pet population.

For example, 69 percent of the 1,711 cats that came through LCARA last year were killed, mostly because they were unadoptable - too sick or injured to treat, or hostile toward humans - and for lack of space, LCARA Program Director Mike Wellington said.

Now, coalition members are running programs such as shuttling cats to high-traffic adoption facilities. Transfers move animals that would otherwise be killed to another location, lowering LCARA's euthanasia rate and giving pets a second chance at adoption. Cat euthanasia is currently down to 66 percent of felines that come into the shelter. Wellington estimates that it will drop to 50 percent in the next three months.

While the coalition is working to find homes for all homeless animals, its true target is to stop unwanted pets at the source. Members are looking to raise \$125,000 to open a low-cost, high-volume spay-and-neuter clinic next year in north Eugene.

"People underestimate just how much has to be done," said Jill Winans, executive director of the Eugene-based Willamette Animal Guild, which is affiliated with the coalition. "There probably aren't enough vets here to take care of the entire problem."

The No Kill Community Coalition also includes members of the Shelter Animal Resource Alliance, the Stray Cat Alliance, the Cottage Grove Humane Society, Pro-Bone-O, the Eugene Kennel Club, the Feral Cat Coalition, McKenzie Cascade Dog Fanciers and other animal welfare supporters.

Though the coalition is made up of dog and cat groups, its members agree that the cat population, which they say is out of control, will take top priority until they see euthanasia rates drop to match those of dogs.

New cooperation emerges

Until recently, the coalition's hackles were raised somewhat at LCARA's Wellington, with some members accusing him of not being committed to finding homes for adoptable animals in the shelter.

But now, the group is working closely with Wellington, the coalition's Calderwood said, and its members logged more than 80 volunteer hours at LCARA in October.

"What happened? We sat down and talked," Wellington said. "Now we can agree to disagree. They took the time to do the research on where we needed help."

Some debate remains over the terminology of "no kill," which Wellington believes is misleading. He instead prefers the term "low kill," because even in no-kill shelters, vicious and extremely ill and injured cats and dogs are euthanized.

Greenhill Humane Society Executive Director Johnnie Prince said Greenhill is not a member of the No Kill Community Coalition because she also finds the term "no kill" inaccurate.

"As soon as we say we are no kill, and people find out we've killed animals that are unadoptable, people think they've been lied to," she said.

"We have the same goal, though: No healthy adoptable animals should have to die because there's no home for them."

Wellington said that LCARA, which has a limited budget and staff, was already doing as much as it could to lower euthanasia rates.

In the past, the shelter has been plagued by a lack of committed volunteers necessary to operate life-saving programs, he said. He credits the participation of coalition volunteers for the 550 percent increase in cat transfers compared with this time last year.

"I think (the coalition) has breathed new life into people," coalition member McDonnell said. "Personally, I hadn't been motivated to do anything because the cat situation is so terrible in Eugene. If it wasn't for the (coalition), there's no way I would have gone down and signed up to volunteer at LCARA."

McDonnell worked with PetSmart to bring cats from LCARA to the PetSmart store on Chad Drive, where they are always on hand to adopt. PetSmart donates blankets, food, litter and space at no cost to the county. Since the beginning of October, more than 12 adult cats and a few kittens have been placed in homes.

Some LCARA cats now travel as far as Portland in search of a good home. In two trips north on Interstate 5, coalition members have transferred 20 cats to the Oregon Humane Society in Portland, and five to the Cat Adoption Team in Sherwood, member Starly Pupkie said.

Pupkie said she hopes to begin transferring five or six cats each week to these high-traffic sites.

"It's going to make some difference in the plight of the cat population," Pupkie said. "It's going to give us the ability to try and do more for the cats."

Nearly 40,000 surgeries yearly

The biggest problem in Lane County is the vast shortage of low-cost sterilization clinics, the Willamette Animal Guild's Winans said. Thousands of surgeries are performed each year, she said, but they represent a tiny fraction of the number of fertile pets in the area.

"Private clinics perform probably 37,000 to 40,000 alterations a year," she said. "That sounds like a lot, but that's probably half of what needs to be done."

Many students and low-income households can't afford the full price of an alteration surgery, Winans said, and others just don't care. The cats then breed, and as kittens are born and abandoned, colonies of feral cats form.

Winans hopes for the Willamette Animal Guild to open a below-cost clinic by the beginning of 2007. The guild will operate the clinic, but its involvement in the coalition has brought it together with fresh fundraising allies.

A major effort comes Thursday, when the guild, along with local kennel clubs, will host a \$100 a plate fundraising benefit at the Oregon Electric Station.

Even before Thursday's event, the coalition has already raised more than \$30,000.

The other area low-cost clinics - one operated by the city of Eugene and a new clinic in Springfield - charge just enough to break even on rent, staff and supplies, Winans said.

But the guild clinic will charge below that cost and make up the difference through fundraising.

The city, which offers a female cat spay for \$60, isn't worried about losing business to other low-cost clinics.

"We really need another clinic, we're really overwhelmed," supervisor Trudy Salerno said. "The feral cat population is horrendous."

The city's clinic manages about 3,500 surgeries annually. Salerno said that surgeries are often booked about two months in advance - the time it can take for a cat to conceive and give birth.

While the coalition works to open the Willamette Animal Guild clinic, all its members are remaining optimistic that the once-disparate parties, who continually sparred on animal welfare policy, will manage to keep their fangs hidden for the sake of the animals.

"There's more of a broad-based variety of people in this group, and hopefully it will last," coalition member Pupkie said.

"Hopefully this group can stay together and work to affect the population problem."
