

GUEST VIEWPOINT

Spay, neuter assistance on the way

By Jill Winans, Diana Robertson

and Leigh Anne Jasheway-Bryant

Published: Friday, February 23, 2007

One of the many heart-wrenching lessons we learned from Hurricane Katrina was just how deeply most Americans, even the poorest of the poor, care about their companion animals.

Many people chose not to leave their homes, even in the face of disaster, if they couldn't take their animal friends with them. And those who did leave their animals behind spent months desperately searching shelters and Web sites. Some are still searching.

Here in Lane County, citizens of all income levels are just as attached to their animal companions, as is evident by the many dogs we see playing at dog parks and homes with cats sunning themselves in the windows. If we feel so much love for our animals, however, why are animal shelters and rescue groups so overburdened with animals in dire need of homes?

The main reason is the high cost of spaying and neutering. Most people understand that spaying and neutering not only prevent health problems and make animals better companions, but are the responsible things to do in a community where thousands of "surplus" cats and dogs are killed every year. Unfortunately, if you are one of the thousands of local residents whose income barely provides for essentials, you cannot afford to spend (on average) \$135 to spay a cat or \$85 to have one neutered - or for dogs, \$205 and \$153, respectively.

While some limited spay-neuter assistance is available locally, it falls far short of meeting the growing need. So the Willamette Animal Guild has formed to create a high-volume spay-neuter clinic to provide surgery at very low cost for all Lane County residents who receive some form of public assistance, those participating in trap-neuter-release or rescuing five or more cats per year, and residents of targeted housing complexes known to have problems with animal abandonment.

Having sufficient affordable spay-neuter resources benefits everyone:

- Low-income residents can do their part to reduce the huge numbers of kittens and puppies born in Lane County.
- Community shelters will no longer be overwhelmed year-round.
- Fewer innocent animals will end up being killed simply because no homes can be found for them.
- Those devoted to trapping feral cats (cats that have been abandoned and become wild) can get them altered without depleting their personal resources.
- Taxpayers' dollars will be saved, since studies show that every dollar spent on spay-neuter programs ends up saving \$10 on taxpayer-funded animal control services.

- Nonprofit animal welfare groups such as Shelter Animal Resource Alliance, which now need to spend most of their time and money rescuing surplus cats and dogs from animal control shelters before they are killed, will be able to direct more of their resources to "special needs" animals, and to helping create a no-kill community in Lane County, so that no adoptable or medically and behaviorally treatable shelter animal is killed (for information, go to www.nokillcommunity.org).

A recent survey found that almost 90 percent of Americans consider their animal companions part of the family. It's time we all reached out to our neighbors who want to be responsible animal guardians, but don't have the resources to spay or neuter their animals.

Let's join together to give everyone in Lane County the chance to demonstrate that we are the loving, responsible people our dogs and cats think we are.

Jill Winans is executive director of the Willamette Animal Guild. Diana Robertson is executive director of the Shelter Animal Resource Alliance. Leigh Anne Jasheway-Bryant, author of "Bedtime Stories for Dogs" and "Bedtime Stories for Cats," is a feral cat rescuer. More information is available at www.sarasavesanimals.org and at www.wagwag.org.