

No-kill coalition sets priority to build spay-neuter clinic

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Cat lovers, dog breeders and animal rights activists in Eugene may not agree on much, but they're supporting a call for an end to the killing of adoptable and treatable pets at area animal shelters.

Inspired by Nathan Winograd, a national no-kill animal shelter expert who came to Eugene last month, a group consisting of animal welfare organizations, local kennel clubs and some unaffiliated animal rights activists formed the No Kill Community Coalition.

"It's kind of like religion and politics," said Sylvia Calderwood, a coalition member. "We don't talk about our differences. We focus on what we all agree on, and that's moving the county toward a no-kill philosophy."

The coalition consists of members and representatives from the Willamette Animal Guild, the Feral Cat Coalition, the Stray Cat Alliance, Shelter Animal Resource Alliance, Cottage Grove Humane Society, Pro-Bone-O, Eugene Kennel Club, McKenzie Cascade Dog Fanciers and other supporters of animal welfare.

Establishing a low-cost, high-volume spay-and-neuter clinic is the coalition's top priority, said Jill Winans, a coalition member and a representative from the Willamette Animal Guild. However, to bring down the cost of sterilization to a level that low-income pet owners can afford, the group needs to raise tens of thousands of dollars.

The no-kill approach can be defined as saving sick and injured animals that are treatable; spaying, neutering and releasing feral cats; and placing all adoptable animals in homes. The no-kill philosophy does not extend to animals that are too sick to continue suffering or too vicious to be adopted safely, said Calderwood, a Shetland sheepdog breeder for the past 40 years.

Winograd, a former shelter director in San Francisco, said a shelter running at peak efficiency can find homes for almost all stray and abandoned animals, as well as feral cats. And the no-kill approach can be cost effective, he said.

His costs in San Francisco for holding a cat the minimum number of days, cleaning its cage, killing the animal and getting rid of the carcass were \$100. But the cost of sterilization was \$25.

The market rate for sterilizations by veterinarians is spendy. A cat spay averages \$135; a dog spay, \$205. A cat neuter averages \$85, while a dog neuter \$153, Winans said. These fees are well above the reach of low-income pet owners and people who care for feral cats, she said.

"If you offer spay and neutering at a price people can afford that will really help the problem," Winans said.

The goal is to raise \$40,000 to open the clinic by year's end; the coalition already has raised \$9,000, she said.

Initially, the clinic would offer 6,000 spay-and-neuter procedures a year with the goal of expanding to 20,000 a year. The clinic would offer cat surgery for \$35; dogs would average \$70. Low income residents would pay a portion of that amount with animal welfare organizations ponying up the balance. For example, a pet owner might pay \$10 for a \$35 cat surgery, with the Stray Cat Alliance contributing \$25, Winans said.

"Our job is to get prices down as much as possible," she said.

The need for a low-cost, spay-and-neuter clinic is greater for cats because of their prodigious ability to reproduce, Winans said. Cats can have three litters a year with an average of six kittens per litter. Some parks and apartment complexes are home to colonies of feral cats, which are offspring of abandoned pets, Winans said.

A low-cost, spay-and-neuter clinic would be a good first step in working toward no-kill, said Diana Robertson, executive director of the Shelter Animal Resource Alliance and coalition member. "They're breeding faster than we can adopt them out," she said.

Another key component to no-kill is the creation of an extensive foster care program to ease the pressure on shelter space, to raise newborn animals to adoptable age, to retrain older animals with behavior problems and to make sure that all of the animals are healthy, relaxed and ready to show off to prospective adopters. To do that, shelters need a vast cadre of volunteers to take in cats and dogs for weeks or months, Calderwood said.

The coalition would like to see the Lane County Animal Regulation Authority encourage the use of foster care program, she said. In addition, LCARA could extend its hours, use more volunteers offer more off-site adoptions and euthanize fewer animals, Calderwood said.

"When you go to LCARA you feel like you're visiting death row," she said. "Every animal that is not adopted is killed, and that whole atmosphere has to change."

Mike Wellington, Lane County Animal Regulation Authority manager, disagrees with that assessment.

Since 1990, the percentage of animals euthanized at the facility has decreased, he said.

Also, LCARA recently has expanded office hours. LCARA does not offer foster homes because to liability concerns, and volunteers to help with off-site adoptions are hard to come by in Eugene, Wellington said.

"It's tough to get dedicated volunteers," he said.

To meet the demand of an ever expanding pet population in the area, Wellington said he needs four to five more employees to help LCARA fulfill its mission of protecting the public and providing animal control.

"The sole purpose of our agency is enforcement," Wellington said. "We are not a humane society."

Lane County animal regulation officials have long struggled with how to raise more funds in order to improve services.

The city of Eugene already has a spay-and-neuter clinic, funded in part by pet licensing fees paid by city residents. However, demand for the services is so high that there's a two-month waiting list.

NO KILL

The newly formed No Kill Community Coalition will hold its next meeting from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Tuesday at Harris Hall, 125 E. Eighth Ave.