

Spay Michigan launches first statewide hotline

Pet owners linked with affordable pet sterilization

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The goal of Spay Michigan is to help reduce the number of euthanizations in the state due to overpopulation, as well as helping pet owners who may be going through tough economic times. A new hotline established this week in Michigan will help ease the financial burden of getting Fluffy and Fido spayed or neutered, say the founders of Spay Michigan.

Cat and dog owners in Michigan can start to take advantage of the first statewide pet spay and neuter hotline by calling 888-5SPAY-HELP toll free. Once a call is connected, an operator provides pet owners with information about veterinarians who offer low-cost spay and neuter services in or near their city.

As of Wednesday afternoon, the official launch of the hotline, operator Diane Sitko said she had already fielded more than 20 calls from people asking about affordable pet sterilization in their area. After she finds out what city the pet owner is calling from, she refers to a bank of about 20 veterinarians, rescue groups and animal shelters that agreed to participate.

The affordable spay and neuter services listed with Spay Michigan are for people who cannot afford the full going rate for the procedure, which can cost up to \$200 per pet.

Spay Michigan is a program of All About Animals Rescue, a Warren, Mich., nonprofit organization that adopts out cats and dogs, and sponsors spay/neuter and vaccination clinics. Amber Sitko, the group's founder and president and Diane Sitko's daughter, said the hotline is a much-needed resource as the state's poor economic conditions make it difficult for many pet owners to afford sterilization and as more pets are surrendered at shelters.

"We believe that most pet owners want to be responsible," she said in a statement. "However, for many, it is a financial burden to do so. We are hoping that the Spay Michigan hotline provides a way of reaching out to those pet owners who could use a hand."

The goal is to help reduce the number of homeless and unwanted kittens, cats, puppies and dogs, thousands of which are euthanized in Michigan shelters each year.

Michigan is one of 13 states to offer such a program, according to Esther Mechier, founder of SPAY/USA, a national organization that promotes pet sterilization awareness and education.