

Silicon Valley Animal Shelter Saves More Pets

But, the shelter president said, it is taking in fewer animals, and problems with homeless cats continue.

Santa Clara County, Calif., animal shelters are taking in fewer animals and saving more lives but problems persist with homeless cats, according to Humane Society Silicon Valley President Christine Benninger.

About 14,000 homeless cats are euthanized in Santa Clara County shelters each year, Benninger said during her State of the Animal address April 4 at the Humane Society Silicon Valley (HSSV) animal shelter.

The good news is that our spay/neuter and education programs are working. Fewer unwanted dogs, cats and rabbits are entering shelters and more animals are being adopted into loving homes, she said.

According to Benninger, the number of animals entering Santa Clara County shelters declined from approximately 52,000 animals in 2000 to roughly 35,000 in 2005. Last year, Santa Clara County animal shelters saved nearly 1,000 more animals than the previous year.

The increase is attributed to HSSV's decision to discontinue its animal control contracts with the cities and force the creation of more resources focused on animals in Santa Clara County.

Up until 17 months ago, HSSV was the only animal shelter in the county housing stray and unwanted pets for nine cities. However, San Jose Animal Care & Control opened its doors in October 2004, thus doubling the amount of shelter space in Santa Clara County. While fewer animals are entering shelters, Benninger said those that pose the greatest challenge are homeless cats, which comprised nearly 80 percent of the animals euthanized in shelters.

Benninger said there are an estimated 125,000 homeless cats roaming Santa Clara County. Cats comprise roughly two-thirds of the animals brought to shelters and are euthanized at a far greater rate than dogs or rabbits.

Benninger said this is because a majority of them are feral, unweaned, or too sick to be adopted.

Benninger said HSSV's medical center offers affordable spaying/neutering services as well as a \$10 spay/neuter clinic for feral cats. The shelter has also spearheaded a coalition of shelters, animal control facilities and rescue groups to address the homeless cat epidemic.

The coalition's goal is to significantly reduce the unnecessary euthanasia of homeless cats through non-lethal trap, neuter and return techniques.

HSSV has produced a 30-minute documentary on homeless cats and plans to show the film at a series of Town Hall meetings throughout the year. The first public viewing of the short film is slated for this summer.

A trailer of the film can be accessed on HSSV's website at www.hssv.org.

The goal of this documentary is to raise public awareness about homeless cats and get people to care, Benninger said. Posted: April 26, 2006, 5:00 a.m. EST