



ThePetReview

There's more to the story

Animal advocates say shelter isn't working toward no-kill goals

By **Natisha Hales**
Las Cruces Bulletin

Wanting a no-kill municipal shelter is a common goal among Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley Director Dr. Beth Vesco-Mock and animal advocates throughout the community. The difference between them, however, is how to get there.

Local animal and no-kill advocates said they are concerned the full story is not being told and there must be systematic changes to programs and services in the animal shelter in order to successfully meet the goal of operating a no-kill government-run shelter.

"The kill rate dropping 20 percent at the shelter is true, however, at what cost is it to the animals?" asked Michel Meunier, president and director of Action Programs for Animals, a community coalition geared toward saving animals' lives and enriching the lives of pets and their owners. "There is very little evidence that Dr. Beth has instituted much effort, if any at all, toward the implementation of strategies and the only proven no-kill model that her most successful peers are using – the No-Kill Equation."

The initiative includes mandatory programs and services such as the Feral Cat TNR Program, during which feral cats are trapped, neutered and released; low-cost spay and neuter programs; rescue groups; foster care programs; comprehensive adoption programs, including special on-site and off-site adoption events; pet retention; medical and behavior programs; public relations and community involvement; volunteers; proactive redemptions, meaning a proactive approach to reclaiming lost animals; and a compassionate director.

"How we're going to get there requires a strong, passionate, dynamic leader," Meunier said. "We've reached the end of the line with our current leadership. We're not going to be a no-kill shelter this way."

Meunier said the shelter is not even operating by the "Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters" compiled by the Association of Shelter Veterinarians. Although the shelter is not legally required to adopt these guidelines as its own, Meunier said they provide a basic foundation, and in order to be successful, all shelters should follow them.

Meunier and fellow advocates, including Jean Gilbert, APA board member, Humane Society of Southern New Mexico board member and an active member of no-kill advocacy groups such as New Mexico Pets Alive, and local attorney Anna Juarez, a board member for the Spay and Neuter Action Program, believe there are models Vesco-Mock and the ASCMV board can follow to get a 90 percent success rate under way in even less than a year.

The problem, according to them, is that Vesco-Mock is

unwilling to accept their assistance.

Juarez said she is working with Alamogordo's Animal Village, after her offer to assist with creating a foster program was rejected by Vesco-Mock.

"She's not a team player," Juarez said. "In the spring, Dr. Beth is always in the papers saying they have to kill all these puppies, so I offered to help line up foster homes in December so that when all these puppies would come in the spring, they would already have homes."

"When I met with (the former volunteer coordinator), he told me that there was no need for foster homes at that time. He had an attitude of, 'It's just more work, so why bother?'"

"After two years of offering to help, I am now working with Animal Village. They were more than happy to get whatever help they could get."

Gilbert, a retired educator, said she is willing to provide education on humane pet care and said she would "gladly help the shelter," since she has already spoken with local groups such as the Boys & Girls Club of Las Cruces.

"People would be clamoring to help, but she waits for them to come to her," she said. "(Shelter staff) should be calling people. There are resources abound."

The problem, however, is that those resources are not actively sought or are being turned away, Meunier added.

"A majority of animal welfare groups are not being allowed to make a difference in the community," she said.

Meunier said the ASPCA, after being invited to the facility by Vesco-Mock herself, found the ASCMV was at such a critical level, the organization offered assistance.

"They offered to renovate and train the staff from the bottom up, but they were rejected out right (by the ASCMV board)," she said.

Because of the attitude of the leadership – and Meunier said she holds the ASCMV Board of Directors "the most accountable" – the animals are suffering, she said. With a \$1.9 million budget and increased staff size,

it is unnecessary suffering.

"(The budget) is nothing to sneeze at," she said. "There are programs that have turned their programs around with even less money."

Successful models of no-kill shelters – which means the facility has a 90 percent or higher live outcome rate – can be found throughout the nation, Meunier said, and they follow the No-Kill Equation. Community collaboration is an important part of that initiative, Gilbert said, but they have to be embraced.

"The community is working hard, and most of the programs and services established by advocates, organizations and the pet network can be replicated on-site at the shelter with tremendous impact," Gilbert said, "if the director and management want to work with the community."

"Expectations seem to run the other way with the director and management assuming people will come to the facility without cultivation, without a welcoming or supportive environment. Programs don't get off the ground without sustained efforts and collaboration. And management needs to work with everyone."

“Animal welfare groups are not being allowed to make a difference in the community.”

MICHEL MEUNIER,
APA president and director

Animal Resources	
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Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley 3351 Bataan Memorial West Las Cruces, NM 88012 382-0018 www.ascmv.org	
Doña Ana County Humane Society P.O. Box 1176 Las Cruces, NM 88006 647-4808 www.donaanacountyhumanesocietyinc.org	
New Mexico State University Feral Cat Management Program P.O. Box 3912 Las Cruces, NM 88003 639-3036 fcamp@nmsu.edu www.nmsu.edu/~fcamp	
Humane Society of Southern New Mexico P.O. Box 13826 Las Cruces, NM 88013 523-8020 mail@hssnm.org www.hssnm.org	
Las Cruces Dog Park Coalition P.O. Box 13345 Las Cruces, NM 88013 525-8694	
Pet Help Line Operated by the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico 523-8020	
Safe Haven Animal Sanctuary 840-D El Paseo Road Las Cruces, NM 88001 527-4544 safehaven@nightfury.com www.safehavenanimalsanctuary.net	
Spay and Neuter Action Program 2405 W. Picacho Ave. Las Cruces, N M 88005 524-9265 www.snapnewmexico.org	

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