

On the Positive Side: Encouraging innovation on pet welfare

By Frank Bryce / For the Sun-News Las Cruces Sun-News

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Every now and again people need to receive a pep talk, uplifting presentation or encouraging words to continue struggling to achieve their goals. Often we see this involving athletic events and religious gatherings, less often, thank goodness, after some catastrophe. Some Las Cruces recently got a combination of this through a series of presentations by Michel Meunier, president/director of ACTion Programs for Animals, and Melissa Roberts, executive director of New Mexico Pets Alive.

The programs presented here this past week covered no-kill success stories from around the United States and an in-depth case study of the Austin, Texas companion animal welfare success. Communities reach a no-kill status when their open-admission facility is saving 90 percent or more of the healthy and treatable dogs and cats entering the shelter. Michel and Melissa did an excellent job of reminding some of the more dedicated animal advocates and explaining to people new to the effort what no kill meant and how other communities are achieving this goal.

Michel set forth the no-kill philosophy through the following statements. The first step is the decision to commit to reject the kill-oriented failures of the past and try new methods. Next is to excite the community for the task at hand and then put in place the infrastructure to save animals, the no-kill equation. This requires buy-in and support from the community's Animal Control departments and their open-admission shelter.

There is not room here to discuss in depth all 11 programs and services Michel provided that have been systematically and comprehensively implemented by communities to achieve their goals. However, these include high-volume/low-cost spay and neuter, Trap-Neuter-Return of free-roaming community cats, partnering with rescue groups, foster networks, extensive adoption efforts, pet retention, community involvement, animal enrichment, proactive return of lost/found animals by animal control and shelter along with innovative, committed and compassionate leadership.

Melissa's in-depth look at the Austin success reiterated all of the points Michel presented and, on a positive note, mirrored much of what is being formulated and taking shape within our own community and county. Both Melissa and Michel pointed out our local shortcomings, and many of us are more than aware of those shortcomings. We are also aware of what appears to be a significant shift in our efforts from single focus agenda of organizations and individuals to a coalition approach to address our need in a collective manner.

We are seeing what appears to be a truly exciting change of philosophical and on-the-ground approach with the county and city animal control, team approaches to many of the elements of the no-kill equation, and a very collaborative effort by diverse and different groups. Time will tell how successful our collective efforts will be as we mesh public and private resources and energy but, it was good to get the pep talk Michel and Melissa presented.

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