

## Shelter hopes spay-neuter clinic will reduce numbers: No Easy Fix

Daily Sentinel, Nacogdoches TX - Posted: Sunday, January 2, 2011 2:00 am

By Robbie Goodrich |



A 10-week-old catahoula puppy chews on veterinary technician Becky Adams' pen as she records results from a pre-neutering physical exam Wednesday at the Nacogdoches Animal Shelter spay and neuter clinic. A relatively new service, the clinic offers low-cost services to families who could otherwise not afford to get their pets spayed or neutered.

While businesses across the country are looking for any kind of increases in their bottom lines in this troublesome economy, the fact that the numbers are up at the Nacogdoches Animal Services and Adoption Center is not welcome news.

Last year, the shelter took in 4,289 unwanted dogs and cats, of which 2,793 were euthanized, according to shelter supervisor Jamie Shelton. And on the opposite end of the spectrum, only about 860 animals were adopted out, compared to 1,200 in 2009. Shelton attributed the lower number to, possibly, the down economy. "It has to be the economic times," Shelton said of the

fewer adoptions. "We're 300 to 400 off of what we did last year (2009), which is terrible."

But the good news in the coming new year is that the new low-income spay-neuter clinic at the adoption center is designed to change all those numbers for the positive. The clinic is a collaboration between the city and the Humane Society of Nacogdoches County. City personnel will oversee its operation. "We just recently hired a new tech for the clinic," Shelton said, "who was our kennel attendant here at the shelter."

The clinic is operated mostly by volunteers, which, according to Shelton, is almost unheard of within the industry. Local veterinarian Dr. Wendy Blount performs the surgeries every Thursday, and so far, only shelter animals have been spayed or neutered. Blount donated her services to conduct training for volunteers. Classes were held every other week until the volunteers were trained enough to work hands-on throughout the process, such as preparing the animal and the surgical instruments, with the exception of participating in the surgery itself.

"We were waiting to get our tech hired and trained before opening it up to the public, because from the response we've gotten so far, it's going to be overwhelming," Shelton said. "And that's awesome. People are contacting us. They care. They want their animals fixed, which I believe is all part of education. "And, really, that's the only thing we can do to get them to understand the importance of spaying and neutering, is through education," she said.

Shelton said while there are costs involved in offering the spay-neuter clinic, there are creative ways to lessen expenses. "We just took what we had and made it work," she said. "We took our education room, split it in half, with half of it for shelter employees and the other half for the spay-neuter clinic, divided down the middle by cages.

"All the animals are prepped for surgery in the education room, then moved into the surgical room, which was a closet," she said.

The initial goal is to perform about 1,300 surgeries a year, Shelton said, increasing that number as time passes. "According to information from other spay-neuter clinics, in order to have the greatest impact within a community, you have to sterilize animals really quickly before the breeding cycles begin," she said. "For every 1,000 that are sterilized, you can reduce shelter intake for that year by 760 animals.

Shelton said she doesn't believe in harping on the "negative side" of what the shelter does to get people to understand the need for spaying and neutering pets, because that can have a negative effect. "People know what we do here at the shelter, and they don't want to see it," she said. "So, I like to focus on the positive."

And that's spaying and neutering pets that come into the shelter and adopting out as many as possible. Shelton also wants to see continued community involvement in shelter operations. "This is a community facility. We want the community to come in and help us out," she said, "whether it's volunteering, or whatever people feel they can do."

Longview shelter workers came to the Nacogdoches shelter a few months ago to observe local operations and learn about the new spay-neuter clinic. "Our shelter was alive with volunteers and teams working together," she said. "They (the Longview observers) said that's not something you see in most shelters. Here, we encourage it. We want the community to see what we're all about, help us and work with us. Because, ultimately, the shelter belongs to them."

Volunteers at the shelter walk dogs, socialize puppies and cats, play with the animals and help with bathing and grooming. Some volunteers, mostly students, have been trained by shelter staff to help with vaccinations, Shelton said. "And they do a wonderful job. "We look to the volunteers to do all those little extra things that make a world of difference to a pet," she said. "It's all those little things that keep animals healthy, in addition to the care we give. We can only do so much in a shelter environment, which is very stressful for an animal."



Staff photo by Andrew D. Brosig Veterinarian Dr. Wendy Blount operates to spay a female border collie puppy Thursday in the spay and neuter clinic at Nacogdoches Animal Shelter. Blount and her team are currently performing surgeries on animals who have been adopted or are awaiting adoption at the facility, she said.

In addition to trying to reduce pet over-population by spaying and neutering animals, encouraging adoptions are at the top of this year's to-do list. "Everybody needs a pet," Shelton said. "Every child should grow up with a dog or a cat. This really is a wonderful place to get a pet. You're saving a life when you adopt."



Krystle Page of Groveton gets to know one of the kittens available for adoption Thursday at the Nacogdoches Animal Shelter. Page visited the shelter and adoption facility hoping to find a furry companion for her 2-year-old daughter, Hannah.

There are currently about 100 animals at the shelter. About 20 dogs were taken in last Tuesday alone, Shelton said.

When asked about the local shelter eventually becoming a "no-kill" shelter, Shelton shared her thoughts on the subject and information she gathered at a no-kill conference a few years ago in Louisiana. "It is wonderful listening about the no-kill ethic," she said. "I think in order to make it happen, you have so much community involvement, because you are taking all these animals in, and you are trying to get them out, in one way or another, whether it is through

adoption or foster homes or rescue groups, before you reach your full capacity. Once you reach your full capacity, in order to control disease, you have to keep the numbers down.

"Ultimately, we could pack this place, with animals in every cage," she said. "But realistically, we can't do it because of disease control, and we have to think about that. The more animals we have in here, the easier it is to have a disease outbreak. "Realistically, I can't do that here," she said.

Shelton said she personally does not know of any no-kill shelters. She believes in order to make that claim, shelters simply surrender unwanted animals to another facility for euthanasia, so that they are not in the shelter's care when they are put down. "I don't know anyone who wouldn't think no-kill is a wonderful theory," she said. "At some point, when we get a handle on the spaying and neutering and the over population here, it can be a reality, but not right now."

Pet owners who wish to inquire about the spay-neuter clinic's income eligibility guidelines, which are based on state poverty level guidelines, may contact the shelter at 560-5011.

Robbie Goodrich can be reached at [rgoodrich@dailysentinel.com](mailto:rgoodrich@dailysentinel.com).



Shelter workers, from front, Amanda Barios, Antoine Romero and LaDonna Rhoudes prepare fresh litter boxes for the cat kennels Thursday at the animal shelter. Volunteers make up a significant portion of the workforce at the shelter, and more are always welcomed, said shelter director Jamie Shelton.