

Advertisement



**Let me help you
lock in a fixed rate below Prime[‡]**

Leah Esquivel
Capital One Home Loans Consultant

**Get a free consultation
with a loan professional**



Powered by  Clickability

The fix is in for pet control

By Sharon L. Peters, Special for USA TODAY

In Mooresville, Ind., Tonja Robertson works the crowd at the bustling little farmers market every Saturday. She sets up near the honeybee-farm booth, arranges the muffins she baked at 4:30 that morning, and speaks of her passion — the millions of unwanted puppies and kittens born every year and the simple way to end that. On a good day, six or seven people accept vouchers she offers for low-cost pet sterilizations.

Five hundred miles away, in Asheville, N.C., more than 100 dog- and cat-toting pet owners arrive at the Humane Alliance or its pickup sites daily, drawn by the well-publicized promise of cheap, quick sterilizations.

Similar scenes are being repeated across the country — from urban centers to farmlands to reservations — through huge initiatives and tiny grassroots efforts.

While California is in the spotlight for controversial mandatory-pet-sterilization legislation under discussion there, the rest of the country is hearing an insistent message that, although far short of compulsory sterilization, encourages and facilitates spay/neuters.

"We now know we can't adopt our way out of the pet overpopulation problem. We've got to halt the problem at the source," says Peter Marsh of Concord, N.H. His state allocates \$2 of every mandated dog license to help low-income residents sterilize their pets. Since its passage, 70% fewer dogs and cats are being euthanized annually.

The simple math, experts say, is that far more animals are being born every year than can be placed.

More pets than potential homes for them

Despite successful campaigns to persuade prospective owners to adopt shelter pets, about 7 million dogs and cats are euthanized in shelters every year, and there's no evidence that adoptions will increase enough to close the gap, experts say.

The massive number of animals euthanized in shelters "was the secret that no one wanted to talk about or hear about," even as recently as the 1990s, when 17 million animals were being destroyed annually, says Aimee St. Arnaud of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). Now those numbers are being broadcast and push to spay or neuter is accelerating:

- Pet overpopulation and sterilization conferences are drawing thousands. In September, the Southern Regional Spay/Neuter Leadership Conference takes place in Memphis; in October the Fix It Forum will be held in Oak Brook, Ill.

- Big companies are contributing millions. In 2006, PetSmart Charities gave \$4.2 million to sterilization initiatives, nearly triple the amount granted in 2002. And the foundation just announced a \$6 million, five-year program called Spay Texas, which it believes will sterilize 1 million pets.

- Groups large and small are providing or subsidizing low-cost or free sterilizations, often using mobile units. The North Shore Animal League America is making it simple for anyone anywhere to locate discounted programs. Its SPAY/USA (800-248-7729 or www.spayusa.org) service constantly updates a list and answers 2,800 queries a month.

Advertisement

**Find the Top
Traditional
Van**

Get free info, reviews,
ratings and prices on
traditional vans.

edmunds.com

•The Humane Alliance in Asheville, which performs 22,000 sterilizations annually and is regarded as the gold standard for low-cost, high-volume spay/neuters, has received grants from the ASPCA and PetSmart Charities to help groups in several states, including California, Illinois, Georgia, Tennessee and Ohio, establish similar programs.

"The euthanasia rate in the Asheville area has been reduced by 72%," says St. Arnaud. Providing money to extend that model made sense, she says.

In an unprecedented move, several groups, including ASPCA, Humane Society of the United States, PetSmart Charities, International Fund for Animal Welfare and United Animal Nations, collaborated to fund a massive operation on the Gulf Coast, where 80% of the animals that wound up in shelters after Hurricane Katrina weren't neutered. The money supports voucher-subsidy programs plus clinics and mobile units capable of sterilizing nearly 40,000 animals a year. Some 22,000 animals have already been reached, says HSUS' Vicki Stevens.

'Many people don't appreciate the necessity'

Meanwhile, grassroots groups, most of them operating on a shoestring, are making inroads.

•Spay-Neuter Indianapolis Pets (SNIP), the effort headed by Robertson, is battling mind-set and logistical issues. "Many people don't appreciate the necessity of sterilization," she says, so much of the task is determining and presenting the most convincing argument for that person. Subsidized vouchers help, but there's still the long journey to the vet, so she's doing fundraising to buy a van. And she'll do the transport.

•In Colorado Springs, the Hamlett Spay & Neuter Clinic performs about 550 sterilizations a month. Sterilizations are free to those who can prove need; low-cost is available to others.

Wherever they are performed, sterilizations in the future may be faster, cheaper and non-surgical — probably a shot or an implant. The non-profit Alliance for Contraception in Cats & Dogs has been pushing for a non-surgical approach since 2000; it expects to present by year's end a petition pressing pharmaceutical companies to bring animal contraceptives to market.

Contraceptives are in limited use in Europe and Australia. In the USA, a contraceptive for male dogs could be on the market by 2008, says ACC&D's Joyce Briggs. The group hopes to raise \$10 million for research and development of promising non-surgical treatments.

"We think this will make a dramatic difference in the pet overpopulation problem worldwide, " she says.

Find this article at:

http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-07-04-spayed-cats_N.htm



Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Copyright 2007 USA TODAY, a division of Gannett Co. Inc.