

**Sunday Column – No Accident
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It is no accident that “providing high-volume and high-quality spay/neuter” is the first thing listed in the PAWS Humane mission statement. In the 1970s, when there were 67 million pets in U.S. homes it is estimated that as many as 20 million were euthanized annually. Do the math and this comes to a horrifying 30% of all pets winding up in shelters only to be euthanized.

This puts today’s numbers into perspective when there are roughly 176 million pets and 3 – 4 million are euthanized in shelters each year. This equates to fewer than 3% of all pets but is still half of those entering shelters. The great news is that many communities are doing far better than this and Columbus, Georgia is one of them.

PAWS Humane allocates over half of its budget to promoting and performing high-volume spay/neuter surgeries. We do this because we know that we cannot simply adopt our way out of pet overpopulation. To eliminate pet overpopulation requires a comprehensive approach with an emphasis on eliminating the root problem. To be successful we need to stop accidental breeding of companion animals.

PAWS Humane has been the primary source of low-cost spay/neuter surgeries for shelters, rescue groups, community cat projects and the public in west Georgia and east Alabama since 2009. When PAWS Humane opened its doors, Columbus Animal Care and Control was taking in as many as 8,000 companion animals each year. In 2016 that number declined to fewer than 4,300.

Fewer intakes combined with large-scale adoption services and the Best Friends Community Cat Project have caused the euthanasia rate to decline as well; from 80% (6,095 animals) in 2009 to 20% (871) in 2016. We’re getting close to “no-kill” status in Columbus but we will not stop until we can place all healthy or treatable companion animals in our region into loving forever homes.

The last Tuesday of February was designated as World Spay Day by the Humane Society of the United States to highlight the importance of accessible and affordable spay/neuter when it comes to saving lives. In the 1970s few of us even thought about spay/neuter. Today at least 85% of companion animals have been altered.

Owners who don’t spay or neuter their pets do so primarily because they lack geographic and/or economic access to veterinary services. That is why PAWS Humane has expanded our community outreach activities to target underserved neighborhoods with high rates of poverty. It is a labor intensive process that generates big rewards over time. This is where we will ultimately win the battle against pet overpopulation and the needless suffering of companion animals.

Bobbi Yeo lives in Opelika, AL. She is the CEO of PAWS Humane in Columbus, GA, an animal shelter and veterinary clinic offering low-cost spay/neuter and other services to the public. Email her at byeo@pawshumane.org with your comments and story ideas.