

## **Sunday Column – The Dog Days of Summer**

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The headlines are everywhere:

- “Maricopa County Animal Care & Control shelters are overcapacity” (Arizona, May 29)
- “Summer intakes push Bossier Animal Control to max capacity” (Louisiana, June 21)
- Florence-Lauderdale Animal Shelter is facing problems due to summer overcrowding (Florida, July 9)
- Animal intake at Tuscaloosa shelter increases during summer (Alabama, July 25)

It is no surprise that all of these headlines come out of southern states. In general the northern states have a better overall record of addressing pet overpopulation. In the south, we are not only behind the times but our challenge is greater due to our warmer climate. Dogs can have two litters per year while cats can have three and greater numbers of newborn puppies and kittens survive to add to the already bulging population.

There simply are not enough shelter kennels, foster homes, or permanent forever homes. In the articles noted above personnel at these animal control shelters are telling us they have to put 2 – 3 animals in kennels and cages meant for one. Due to overcrowding they are not able to control the spread of deadly diseases, such as parvo. They are begging for volunteers to help clean the shelter and walk dogs. They are pleading for foster homes to help pick up the slack. Or else.....

Bossier Animal Control adopted 70 pets between June 1 and June 21, 2016. They took in 307 pets during the same period. On May 29, 2016, Maricopa County Animal Control was caring for 817 animals. This article noted that the situation will only become more dire with July just around the corner.

Shelter directors all say the same thing. Spay and neuter your pets! But when the fee to spay a large female dog is upwards of \$300, too many pet owners cannot afford to have their pets altered. Large breed dogs are most at risk in shelters because they produce the largest number of puppies which increases animal control intakes.

Cats are a major source of shelter overcrowding. Nikki Hoggle, operations manager for Tuscaloosa Metro Animal Shelter says, “one unaltered feral cat can return 144 new cats into the shelter in a two year period.”

Many shelters operate voucher programs or their region has a low-cost high-volume spay/neuter clinic. Regardless of the program this is a numbers game. The first challenge is to connect with the people most in need of these services. Typically, they are not reached through mainstream media channels.

Pets for Life, a program developed by PetSmart and the Humane Society of the United States, promotes a face-to-face approach. This is what it takes to gain trust and demonstrate that our

intentions are good. We are not there to criticize or take their pets away from them. We are there only to provide the resources that will help owners and pets have better lives.

It is this time of year that I am most thankful to work at a limited admissions shelter but I know how it is to work in open admissions facilities where you can't say no to the next intake just because you have no space.

It should not be this way, but it is, and that is what we have to contend with. We can only ask the community to help wherever they can, whether this is volunteering on site, fostering or making contributions of supplies or cash. Please...help us help them.

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