

Sunday Column – No-Kill by 2025
For publication 4.9.17

Last week, NPR aired a story about a coalition of animal welfare organizations led by Best Friends Animal Society, who have made a commitment to bring the U.S. to “no-kill” status for shelter cats and dogs by 2025.

I shared the story on Facebook. The term “no-kill” is used to describe the proposition that at least 90% of animals entering shelters should leave with a positive outcome whether that be adoption, transfer to a rescue group, or other live release, such as a job as a detector dog at USDA. For many, this sounds like an audacious goal and a couple of Alabamian friends, who have been in the thick of animal welfare in that state, expressed doubt that this will ever happen.

Having worked in animal welfare in Alabama I get it. Trying to get spay/neuter legislation passed in that state was a lost cause and after failing to pass a bill four years in a row it appears we have given up. (Just for the record some of us haven’t given up but we acknowledge that Alabama may have to be last.)

Providing access to free and low-cost spay/neuter surgery is the number one strategy for achieving a “no-kill” nation. Unfortunately, a small group of veterinarians in Alabama successfully stopped the spay/neuter bill in its tracks. I can’t say as I’ve ever experienced a group of people with such an aversion to common sense.

All this bill would have done is allowed nonprofit spay/neuter clinics to hire a veterinarian for the purpose of performing spay/neuter surgeries. The animal welfare advocates compromised the bill down to the lowest level of service that would get the job done. These clinics would not have been permitted to do anything but spay/neuter dogs and cats and provide a rabies vaccine.

Shortly after taking a job in Columbus, Georgia I wrote a column that began, “Cross a state border, a time line, and the Chattahoochee River and everything changes. Just thirty miles from my home in Opelika the crippling challenges, faced by animal welfare workers here in Alabama, are lifted.”

Georgia is an entirely different story when it comes to animal welfare. Here, the veterinary practice act permits veterinarians to work for nonprofit organizations. Nonprofits can apply for grants which expand access to free and low cost spay/neuter surgeries for the general public. Reducing unwanted litters improves quality of life in local communities while it reduces costs to municipal governments.

Columbus, Georgia is very close to being added to a list of 200 “no-kill” cities in the U.S. This doesn’t just mean that PAWS Humane is a no-kill shelter. That’s too easy. What I mean, is that

animal control, located right next door to PAWS, is live releasing almost 90% of the animals they take in.

It's not just happening in Columbus. Fulton and DeKalb Counties' animal control operations have been taken over by an organization called LifeLine Animal Project. This project was the brainchild of Rebecca Guinn, an attorney who happened to visit animal control one day and realized she had to do something.

Best Friends Animal Society recently opened Best Friends Atlanta at the site of the former Atlanta Pet Rescue. They are determined to change the face of animal welfare in Georgia like they have in Utah, Los Angeles and elsewhere.

This kind of sea change does not occur within the silos of independent animal welfare organizations. These miracles happen through the work of coalitions. Together we will do what we could not do alone.

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.