

Sunday Column – Dog Days of Summer
For publication 8.6.17

It's been a hard summer in Columbus, Georgia. Taking the long view we have made great strides toward becoming a "No-Kill" community. However, the past couple of months have been a disappointment in terms of the number of animals euthanized at our local animal control agency.

PAWS Humane, along with other shelters in our area, have experienced a decline in adoptions this year. I've been pouring over data collected in previous years and it is hard to draw any conclusions or even to find seasonal fluctuations that hold true from year to year.

One thing I do know is that the adoption market is sensitive to price. When the price decreases, adoptions increase, and vice versa. In an attempt to save lives PAWS Humane, and shelters all over the south, are literally giving away animals.

There are those who are critical of this strategy. Among their fears is that adopters of "free" animals will not have the best of intentions. Another concern is that the customers we attract will not be able to afford adequate veterinary care for their new pets.

I had these concerns myself at one time but they do not hold up against studies published by various national animal welfare organizations. Long-term outcomes for adopted pets do not correlate to the price paid.

Another thing we know for sure is that if we are not able to clear enough space to pull animals out of animal control facilities these otherwise adorable pets face certain death. Given the stark reality, we are willing to take a risk or two and hope for the best. Our screening process is the same whether or not a fee is paid.

Our highest risk group of animals is large breed dogs, or those 45 pounds and over. The market is far too small for the relentless incoming population. It's a function of simple mathematics. Large breed dogs have large litters. It isn't their fault and they don't deserve the poor outcomes they get.

PAWS Humane is committed to reducing the number of unwanted pets coming into our animal control shelters. We provide free and low-cost spay and neuter surgeries to 7,000 – 8,000 animals each year.

Our people are on the streets, knocking on doors in under-served neighborhoods with the intent of building relationships and helping pet owners get their pets into our clinic for spay/neuter and wellness services. Our goal is to help loving owners keep their pets healthy and happy and out of animal control facilities.

We will never adopt our way out of pet overpopulation. It takes a comprehensive approach to solve this problem.

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.