

Making life count

Tri-Agency presses to decrease use of euthanasia

"Heaven goes by favor. It it went by merit, you would stay out and your dog would go in."

— Mark Twain

Story and photos
by DAGMAR OBEREIGNER
Of the Emerald

More than 25,000 dogs and cats were destroyed in Lane County last year.

"Taxpayers have to pay \$28 for each animal's putting down," says Kathi Prevost, education assistant of the Tri-Agency Animal Regulation Authority. "People think of animal shelters as dumps," she continues. "They'd rather dump their animal at a shelter and never have to see it again, and maybe they can convince themselves it's found a new home."

Tri-Agency staffers try to eliminate irresponsible pet owners by providing the facilities for and encouraging licensing, spaying and neutering, and distemper and rabies shots.

Tri-Agency, which celebrated

its grand opening last week at its new location at 3970 W. 1st Ave., has facilities including a kennel with quarantine, puppy and holding areas, a euthanasia room and freezer, and Oregon's first low-cost spay-neuter clinic.

The office has a lost and found dog service, and gets about 25 lost calls a day, Prevost says.

Statewide, about 90 percent of dogs without owners are put to sleep. Here in Eugene, the figure is closer to 50 percent, says Diane Yeager, program educator for plant and shelter operation, and Tri-Agency is working to lower it.

Sally Bishop, kennel operator, cares for the dogs until an owner is found or until she has the unhappy duty of destroying them. Unlicensed dogs are kept for only 72 hours, and licensed dogs for 120, she says.

All lost dog calls are checked with the dogs found, and are kept on file. But dog descriptions vary so much, the owner is the only one who can make positive identification, she says. Dog owners who wait a few days to contact the agency and expect their dog to return home on its own, may be too late.

Destroying dogs is harder on the people who do it than on the dogs. "We cry and hug each other a lot," says April Simandl, a kennel attendant. Kennel workers say they give the animals as much love and care as possible, and hold them as they are being killed.

Simandl is now undergoing euthanasia training. "At first you don't want to be a part of it," she says. "But these animals never have to suffer again. They'll never be beaten or starved again," she says with tear-filled eyes.

"Dogs are supposed to be man's best friend, and look what we do to our best friends," Simandl says as she opens the door of the room where the "cruelty cases" are kept.

Cinnamon, a Chesapeake, is only half her normal adult size. She was subjected to acute malnutrition and will never be full-grown.

A Boxer named Sarge has a gash on his throat from one ear to the other. His leash had been left on too tight, too long by an uncaring owner.

A Great Dane's ribs poke through his sides. When he was first brought in, the muscles in his hind quarters were so atrophied he could not stand.



April Simandl, attendant for the Tri-Agency Animal Regulatory Authority, holds a pup while kennel operator Sally Bishop injects it with lethal sodium pentobarbital in a painless operation. Euthanasia was performed over 25,000 times on abandoned dogs and cats in Lane County last year at a cost of \$28 per pet. Only one in ten puppies or kittens brought into the agency or other private kennels is adopted by a new owner; the rest are destroyed.

But the happy occasions help keep the workers going. Simandl recalls the adoption of a basset hound. At the same moments the dog was being readied for euthanasia, a man rushed in looking for a basset hound to adopt. The two hit it off and the dog was saved.

Is the Eugene area caring as far as canines are concerned? Yes and no, says Simandl. She ob-

jects to persons who stress "freedom" and let their dogs run free, maintaining that neutering is "unnatural." "Letting your dog breed and breed is unnatural," she adds angrily.

The spanking new center has been open since December 1. Prior to this, the main office was in Springfield, and animals were kept in the Greenhill Animal Shel-

ter, a private agency, says Prevost.

The spay and neuter clinic is Tri-Agency's hope for a better future for Lane County cats and dogs.

"We're so proud of it," says Prevost. "We're impounding fewer and fewer animals. Every

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