

**Pit bulls make up the bulk of the dogs that wind up at LCARA. This dog waited patiently for three weeks at the shelter before someone took her home.**



## The Road to No-Kill Can Lane County stop killing pets?

by Camilla Mortensen

**W**hen he was brought in to the pound, the orange tabby cat's impound form stated, "chubby fellow with a nice attitude." And later the sign on his metal cage read, "I'm Garfield without the attitude. I'm the best kitty here because: I'm already neutered; I'm comfortable with dogs and other cats; everybody can hold me, even kids."

Garfield never found his way to a new home with dogs, cats and kids. Early on a Friday morning, the tabby cat was pulled out of his cage, and his veins were filled with a dose of sodium pentobarbital that first stopped his breathing and then his heart. His limp body was then placed in a garbage can. After less than a month at Lane County Animal Regulation Authority (LCARA), Garfield was killed.

Garfield is only one of the approximately 1,000 dogs and cats that have been euthanized so far by LCARA in 2007. A growing number of people think they might have a better solution to Lane County's animal overpopulation problem. The No Kill Community Coalition (NKCC) was formed in Lane County to help prevent cats like Garfield as well as dogs and other companion animals from being unnecessarily killed. They have asked the Lane County Commissioners to pass a resolution requiring the county to adopt a no-kill philosophy.

Killing pets is a messy and emotional business no matter who is doing it. Many people are unclear who exactly is "the pound" in Eugene — LCARA or Greenhill. Others don't understand what the designation "no-kill" really means. If they do know what LCARA is, some people are put off by its reputation for killing animals. Others wonder if Eugene and the rest of Lane County are willing to put out the human and monetary resources to stop killing its stray cats and dogs.

Eugene is home to thousands of animal lovers: People who take their beloved pets to get their nails clipped and polished and buy them cute outfits and collars with crystals. People who spend hundreds of dollars to take sick pets to specialists and acupuncturists and herbalists. So in a town filled with businesses devoted to adored pets and the people who love them, why did we let a nice chubby cat get killed?

At a February County Commissioner's meeting, LCARA manager Mike Wellington said, "Garfield should not have been put down, but here again, Garfield had been there over 30 days."

LCARA kennel supervisor Tom Howard said at the same meeting, "It was a space issue."



### Euthanasia

Last year, LCARA impounded 1,710 cats, and 1,188 of those cats were euthanized. Of the cats that were killed, 1,093 were listed as nonadoptable, 42 were killed by owner request, and 53 were killed for lack of space.

The dogs of Lane County fare slightly better. So far this year 1,561 dogs have been impounded, and 232 have been euthanized as unadoptable. Lack of space was the reason listed for 29 canine deaths; 105 were killed by owner request.

Euthanasia at LCARA takes place in a small room with a concrete floor and incongruously cheerful purple walls. The walls were painted by LCARA volunteers to cheer up the animal control officers and the animals they must kill. Near the euthanasia room is the storage freezer, where animals are placed in garbage cans until they are picked up.

There is a door to the outside where officers can go and recuperate, if needed, after putting an animal down. The schedule rotates, but with a small staff, officers will find themselves killing cats and dogs almost daily for days at a time.

As he stood in the small room, Wellington said, "There isn't an officer here who hasn't cried in this room." One of his officers, a 29-year LCARA veteran, isn't asked to euthanize spaniels because he has one of his own and finds it too upsetting to kill dogs that look like his pet.

"You have to be very strong," Wellington said.

Euthanasia, from the Greek "good death," is accomplished through the injection of sodium pentobarbital, a drug sold under brand names such as Sleepaway and Fatal-Plus. This is,

### LCARA is 'woefully mismanaged,' and animals 'are labeled vicious when they are actually deeply frightened.' – Voices for Animals

according to the Humane Society of the United States, the safest and least stressful choice. The animal first goes unconscious, and then it dies. This is the source of the euphemisms that often get used like "put to sleep" or "put down."

Once or twice a week, Baker Commodities, a rendering company, comes and picks up LCARA's garbage cans full of dead cats and dogs as well as animals from local veterinarians and other businesses and takes them to Baker's plant in Washington. LCARA pays Baker approximately \$14,400 a year for this service. Wellington said he was told the animals from LCARA are rendered into fertilizer and shipped to China and Korea.

An article about Baker in *Render* magazine states that the company sells tallow and meat and bone meal in 20 different countries. Cosmetics, organic detergents and even biodiesel are made from Baker Commodities' products. Renderers often refer to their business as "the original recyclers."

The sort of meat and bone meal that Baker produces is indeed used in fertilizers. These "meals" are also used in pet foods. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), "meat meal" is "the rendered product from mammal tissues, exclusive of any added blood, hair, horn, hide trimmings, manure, stomach and rumen contents."

In response to an *EW* call, the Seattle office of Baker Commodities, where Lane County's animals are rendered, first denied servicing LCARA. They then corrected themselves and referred *EW*'s questions to the L.A. office. Baker executive vice-president of operations Dennis Luckey said, "It is against our policy to comment on our process." So exactly what happens to the dogs and cats euthanized at LCARA and other local businesses once Baker has picked them up isn't entirely clear.

Ben Kelley, a former office manager for a animal hospital, says that many area vets, uncomfortable with the rendering of the animals into fertilizer and other products, send remains to Rest Assured Animal Cremation in Springfield.

FDA studies have shown traces of sodium pentobarbital in some pet foods. But the agency said there was no cat or dog DNA in the foods they tested. *Food Pets Die For* author Ann Martin has criticized these tests, calling them "vague." So it is unclear how the euthanasia drug is getting into pet foods. The FDA report suggests it is via cattle and horse euthanasia. However, cattle are rarely killed via lethal injection, and horses are rarely used in pet food — their meat is worth more as an export for humans to consume.

Many might find the idea of rendered dogs and cats in pet food or even fertilizer disgusting, but for members of the No Kill Community Coalition, the solution lies in preventing unwanted dogs and cats from being killed in the first place — and preventing unwanted pets in general.

### LCARA, Greenhill and the NKCC

Many of NKCC's members are pet rescues and businesses along with private citizens. LCARA has taken note of the no-kill goal, stating on its website that one of its goals is to "support and implement the No Kill philosophy as resources allow." According to Wellington, "the overall euthanasia rate is down 29 percent."

But for many, like the local group Voices for Animals, LCARA is not doing enough. Lane County Code states that after impounding a dog, LCARA is required to hold it

**Euthanized pets are picked up from LCARA each week  
to be rendered into bone and meat meal.**