

When the public thinks about the Humane Society, the image that pops to mind is an Adoptathon with all the cute puppies and the joy of seeing kids getting their first pet. However, behind the scenes, there are many services that the Humane Society also provides to the community and the city that are not visible to most citizens. The Humane Society is an additional financial support for the Forrest City Animal Shelter. In the shelter most of the office equipment and a lot of the supplies are provided by the Humane Society. The Society also paid for additional fencing for outdoor dog runs. The Society is available as a resource of information and training that the Animal Control Officers can utilize to improve their skills. Humane Society members are called upon to go out and evaluate cases of suspected animal abuse and work with local authorities to resolve these issues. Humane Society members also stand ready to provide back up help for the Animal Control Officers when they need assistance, and fully mobilize in times of a disaster when families and pets are evacuated, as when Hurricane Katrina hit the coast a few years ago.

Unfortunately, since 2007, the assets which the Humane Society has readily shared with the City have been taken for granted. Now since December, 2008 the dogs have been subjected to needless neglect and cruelty at the hands of the Animal Control Department in Forrest City. Examples of cruelty include, the Animal Control Director describing to Humane Society members how he captured a pit bull with the catch pole; leaving the catch pole still tight around the dog's throat, he put the dog in the truck cage. Driving away, the Animal Control Director said he heard a cracking sound coming from the cage, which he interpreted to be the dog's neck breaking. He left the dog in that condition overnight. We were told the dog was barely alive the next day when the dog arrived at the veterinarian for euthanasia. In another instance, the Animal Control Director had several aggressive males placed in the same fenced area despite being questioned by his junior officer and a Humane Society volunteer. He did not listen to them and the end result was that a Great Pyrenees ripped open the throat of a terrier mix. The terrier mix died an agonizing death and the Great Pyrenees had to be euthanized.

Examples of neglect are illustrated by the improper cleaning techniques used in the kennels. There are chemical disinfectants that should be used to cut down on the spread of infectious disease such as parvovirus or infectious diarrhea. Not only are these chemicals not used, but when the kennels are being washed out, care is not taken to avoid spraying waste material into the water and food bowls. Numerous outbreaks of parvovirus and diarrhea illness have occurred because of this. To compound this problem the Director has told several Humane Society members that he didn't want to take dogs in for euthanasia unless he had about 4 dogs to go. This results in a lot of dogs slowly dying and infecting their kennel mates in the process.

Numerous times during the weekends the dogs are left in excess of 30 hours and occasionally they have been left in excess of 40 hours without the Animal Control Officers going out to the shelter to clean, water, and feed the dogs. We have observed, that often when they do feed the dogs, they do not take into consideration the size and number of the dogs in the kennels with the result that some dogs are over-fed and some

under-fed. Recently there was an instance of one puppy cannibalizing its dead litter mate that had been left in the kennel.

Lack of proper training and knowledge of the laws by the Animal Control Officers also affects the general public. There was one instance of the Animal Control Director telling a Police Officer to shoot a dog. The Director then disposed of the dog knowing the dog had bitten a woman. He seemed to have assumed the dog did not have rabies. This situation should have been handled as though the dog was rabid. There are very strict laws that govern a protocol to protect our citizens in the event of a dog bite.

We have a City Ordinance that states dogs should be held for a minimum of five days, so that families have a chance to reclaim their pets, however because of poor record keeping, often it cannot be determined how long the dogs are held. In another example of problems with record keeping, we have a video tape of a beautiful pit bull who had been at the shelter for 19 days. On about the 20th day, the dog and the documentation simply disappeared.

The Humane Society has worked quietly and persistently behind the scenes with the Animal Control Officers, Mayor McCoy, and the City Council members to reach a solution to these problems. Unfortunately our attempts have been in vain. The Animal Control Director is appointed by and answers to the Mayor. Emerging from meeting after meeting with Mayor McCoy, the Humane Society officers were lead to believe that an understanding was reached with the Mayor only to find later that the issues were never resolved. In a January, 2009 meeting at City Hall that included the Animal Control Director, two Humane Society members and the Mayor, the Director was very rude to the Humane Society member. The Mayor never addressed his City employee's behavior, which appeared to indicate he condoned his outburst.

After countless months of enduring fruitless meetings and watching animals suffer needlessly, the Humane Society realized that further meetings with the Mayor were futile and that their only recourse was to take their grievances public in order to effect change. It was at this time that we decided to charge the Animal Control Director with animal neglect. Unfortunately, this did not turn out as hoped as the Director was found not guilty. According to the judge this verdict was based on the testimonies of two witnesses. The first was that of Mrs. Pat Hollowell who did not hear the question posed and gave a response that seemed to clear the Director. The second witness was the Mayor who testified that Mr. Hamilton was not the Animal Control Director at the time the charges indicated. Mayor McCoy's testimony is contradicted by Mr. Hamilton's employment records which clearly show that he had been promoted to the Animal Control Director's position before the incident occurred.

The Mayor has been able to portray the Humane Society as being on some sort of vendetta, because the general public has not been aware of the history which includes the neglect and abuse at the shelter; the unsuccessful attempts to work with the Mayor to fix the problems at the shelter; and the futile attempts to work with the City Council to effectively address the problems with the Mayor.

According to David Nichol's account printed in The Times Herald, City Attorney Alan Cline left the impression that the city had worked diligently to arrive at some sort of a protocol to serve as a guide for the animal control officers. The only actual pro-offer from the city was that the Humane Society would deed the land to the city, give up our keys and only have access to the shelter during certain hours. It is obvious that the city's objective is to banish the Humane Society altogether from the shelter. It is equally obvious that the only leverage that the Humane Society holds is their ownership of the land and, by default, the building in the absence of a signed lease with the city.

If the Humane Society loses the land and access to the shelter, the abuse and neglect will never stop. The members of the Humane Society have wasted countless hours trying to resolve these issues with the Mayor and the City Council. There is no alternative except the one which the Society has tried at all costs to avoid. A short 10 minute video has been produced which shows graphically the neglect of the physical building and the suffering and injuries inflicted on helpless animals. This video has been released to the news media and to those in the public who would like a copy. We regret bringing bad publicity to the area, but cannot allow helpless animals to suffer needlessly and have no other recourse.

Dogs suffer and die in our shelter on a daily basis. The Humane Society does not want an adversarial relationship with the Mayor, the Animal Control Officers, or the City Council members. All we want is for the officers to work with us to ensure that the shelter facility is maintained, that animals have decent living conditions and that they do not suffer needlessly. The Humane Society is working to write a City Ordinance that will create an Animal Control Commission that will address these problems. Please contact Mayor McCoy and your alderman and ask them to help get this Ordinance passed when it comes before the City Council, so that we can have a true animal shelter instead of the killing shelter like we have now.

Sincerely,

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