



# THE TAOS NEWS

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## My Turn

### **A real problem that requires immediate attention**

**Harvey Yocum**

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Animal Welfare is a social issue and is no different than the issues facing our homeless, domestic violence victims, our elders, youth, substance abuse, and the hospital. It's time for our government entities, community leaders, and citizens of Taos County to acknowledge that this is a real problem and requires immediate attention.

These animals have no choice. They are brought into this world because of irresponsible people. Many of the non-public shelters have had to take on the responsibility for saving these animals and working toward social change. This is the path we have chosen as the Humane Society of Taos, Inc. Stray Hearts acts as both a humane society and the public animal shelter in Taos County.

The implementation of a quality Animal Welfare Ordinance will help to reduce intake and the number of unwanted animals which will ultimately reduce the costs of shelter operations. We need to get this right and ensure that the ordinance is fair, creates some revenue to offset costs, identifies animal ownership, and implements strategies for reducing intake.

The needs for low-cost spay/neuter, education, and outreach is critical to address the underlying issue of an "out-of-control" animal population. It also must be enforceable. My biggest concern is the lack of discussion regarding administration, enforcement, and funding of the new ordinance. The ordinance as written and without proper implementation will put the shelter in an untenable position.

There has not been an increase in the payments to Stray Hearts for several years yet intake continues to increase along with the resources required to operate the shelter.

Here are the 2015 year-to-date intakes: Town of Taos dogs, 509; Taos County dogs, 158; Town of Taos cats, 243; Taos County cats, 68.

Intake is on the rise and we are trending to take in 1 times the number of animals from last year. Intake from the town is 3 times that of the county yet the town pays less than the county.

Stray Hearts Animal Shelter contracts shelter services with the town and county.

The town of Taos and Taos County have a legal obligation to provide these services.

Currently the county provides funding for 22.7 percent and the town provides funding for 15.1 percent of our operational costs; 62.2 percent of legal obligations of the town and county are currently paid for by donors and fundraising.

The Board of Directors and I are dealing with years of shelter neglect, ineffective management, poorly negotiated agreements, a donor base that has all but disappeared, a looming mortgage payment, and the inability to fund the shelter in its current configuration (vision). Our options are limited.

Since 2004, intakes to the shelter are up 2 times and trending to be up 1times over last year. Since 2004 across the board costs are up 21 percent. Veterinary care has increased an average of 2 percent per year with a spike in 2005 of 5 percent. Minimum wage has increased 30 percent since 2004. Gasoline is up a whopping 47 percent along with the associated vehicle maintenance. Nothing has been done to reduce the intake of animals to the shelter.

Our adoptions and transfers are double over last year and our return-to-owners is up 37 percent. Our rotation on new intakes is about 8.3 days. Last year it was 39.6 days. Our maximum length of stay has gone from an average of 548 days down to 157 days.

Our goal is that no animal is in the shelter for longer than 60 days.

Thanks to Dr. Heather Fox, our shelter vet, the shelter is healthy and no illness has come from within the shelter; only from new intakes and all of that was contained.

We have been able to take in animals that were abused, injured, neglected, and sick and pay for their healing.

Since November 2014, we have a professionally run organization with fiscal responsibility at the forefront. Several town and county officials have said that for the first time, they aren't receiving emails and phone calls with complaints about the shelter.

It's now time to help Stray Hearts take the next steps and continue to operate. The alternatives are not what any of us want. We have to make this work as a team.

The resources required for the county or town to open and operate a shelter will cost much more than what we are asking for. We need the voice of the community. Let your voice be heard!

*Harvey Yocum is the executive director of Stray Hearts Animal Shelter.*