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## New Animal Services Director: Let's Work Together

By Nick Marnell

Contra Costa County Animal Services director Beth Ward said it hit her as she drove to work across the Dumbarton Bridge in 2008.

"I was thinking, how much people care about animals. How much their families care about animals. How much the community cares. Everyone cares, but we all work in silos, individually. I thought I would encourage everyone to work together," she said. Ward spearheaded the formation of an alliance that included the Humane Society Silicon Valley, of which she was chief operating officer, and five other area shelters, and christened it the WeCARE coalition, whose purpose was to end the euthanasia of all healthy and treatable dogs and cats in Santa Clara County. "The save rate is expected to hit 90 percent in 2015," she said.

Which fits into the job description outlined by county administrator David Twa, who hired Ward after two rounds of recruitment that lasted over two years. "There is a greater community expectation in terms of the role of the animal services department," he said. "Not only enforcement, and the protection of the community, but to reduce euthanasia and to provide adoptive homes for the animals that are brought to a shelter."

Twa said that since the county

shelter is public, and must receive all animals in need, it would not work to set what he called an arbitrary number as a percentage save rate objective.

"Within the next year we expect to see more community outreach and an increase in the number of animals saved and provided to good homes," he said. Animal Services reported a 2014 intake of 11,000 dogs and cats, with a 69 percent save rate.

Ward, a Fresno State graduate with a degree in recreation administration, brings 28 years of animal shelter and veterinary hospital experience to her new position. Though Ward now runs a public department — unlike a private company that can pick and choose which animals it will intake — she noted that some of the same HSSV approaches will apply in Contra Costa County, specifically, regarding spay and neutering and animal intake.

Ward said that there are not enough free or low-cost spay and neuter services in the county. And though she said it is going to be a challenge, she plans to apply for grants, such as from the Petco Foundation, to help fund those services, as she did at HSSV.

"Why can't the public keep their animals?" asked Ward. She said she believes that talking to the customers

at the point of intake, and finding out exactly what the real problem is, will help drive down the number of animal intakes. Ward used an example of possibly a landlord issue causing a high number of animals being surrendered. "If the problem is landlords in a certain area, put a volunteer group together to work out issues with the landlords," she said.

She discussed an interaction at HSSV that worked out successfully for all parties.

"A man came to our shelter, intent on surrendering a large lab-bull mix. He was distraught. The dog wasn't listening to his wife, and she was not comfortable. He could not afford to pay for neutering, because he had just been laid off. Our staff found a doctor who did the neuter service for free, and also found a free eight-week obedience course for the dog. He talked with his wife, and they agreed to go through with it. Six months later, we talked to him, and everything was great."


If one word can summarize Ward, who began her new job Nov. 2 after the unanimous approval of the Board of Supervisors, that word would be collaborative.

"It's possible to save more lives by working together," she said.

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