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Spaying campaigns aim to curb stray population

An effort to reduce the number of animals euthanized at shelters is targeting cats, then dogs.

By [Lindsay Key \(mailto:lindsay.key@roanoke.com\)](mailto:lindsay.key@roanoke.com)

381-1671

In sync with the Pulaski County Humane Society's third annual Feline Fix-A-Thon, recently formed nonprofit NRV Spay is launching an educational campaign to get its mission off the ground.

Though separate, each drive will provide discounted spays and neuters for pet owners. Efforts are timed around Spay Day USA, recognized today by the Humane Society of the United States. Spay Day USA is a national campaign to promote spaying and neutering as a way to end the euthanizing of homeless pets.

According to the Virginia Department of Agricultural Services' online animal report for Montgomery, Pulaski, Giles and Floyd counties and Radford, 1,343 dogs and 1,383 cats were euthanized in 2005. Reports for 2006 are not complete.

NRV Spay member Lila Borge Wills said that pet owners should spay or neuter as part of loving their cat or dog.

"Do it because of the thousands of unloved, unwanted dogs and cats sitting on death row through no fault of their own ... but simply because they were born," Wills wrote in an e-mail.

Wills said that NRV Spay, which consists of organizations VA PAWS, Pound Pals of Radford, Montgomery County Friends of Animal Care and Control, Giles Animal Rescue and Dalmatian Rescue of SW VA, banded together in November.

"Because it's our first year we didn't know if we were going to get a huge goal of a lot of animals done and get it all set up in a quick enough order, so we focused on doing an education campaign," Wills said.

The group is using the media, brochures, posters and distributing information to schools.

In February, Wills said that the shelters put money into a pot in hopes of accomplishing 28 spays in 28 days. They enlisted four veterinary clinics to perform the surgeries. Each clinic's staff was given seven \$50 coupons to disperse to clients for discounted surgeries.

Wills said the veterinarians had lists of customers who had previously indicated an interest. But eventually, NRV Spay hopes to establish an application process.

Meanwhile, Pulaski is working with four veterinary clinics during March to offer half-price surgeries.

Dr. Randy Vaughn with Tipton Ridge Veterinary Medical Center said that cat neuters are normally \$80 and spays are \$97 to \$130 at that clinic, depending if a female is in heat or pregnant. But when pet owners present a half-off coupon printed from the humane society's Web site, they will receive a \$40 neuter, and a \$47.50 to \$60 spay. He said the humane society is paying a fourth of the cost, as is each clinic.

"We budget it into the annual budget so we can give that much community service away a year," Vaughn said. The

center performed about 45 spays and neuters during last year's Feline Fix-A-Thon. He said that he will handle the high volume by working hard. Customers must call ahead for an appointment.

"We'll skip lunch or whatever we have to do to get them all done," Vaughn said. "It's really not as difficult as it might sound. It's like anything else -- you just schedule it into your daily routine."

Vaughn said that spays cost more because it is a more invasive procedure, requiring more anesthetic. Post-surgery, animals experience little to no pain. For a couple of days, a cat may seem a little lethargic, he said.

According to Pulaski County Humane Society staff, 70 percent of the cats that entered the shelter last year were killed.

"The humane society has decided to target the cat population and get that down first, and then head toward the canine population. And that's going to be done at the animal shelter itself -- probably in April or May," Vaughn said.

A spay/neuter facility is in the works at the Pulaski County Animal Shelter and Humane Education Center in Dublin. Vaughn will be one of the veterinarians assisting there once a month.

Feline Fix-A-Thon locations

Community Animal Hospital 5726 Alexander Road, Dublin; 674-1010

Radford Animal Hospital 7367 Lee Highway, Radford; 639-3891

Tipton Ridge Veterinary Medical Center 1858 Bob White Blvd., Pulaski; 980-0186

West End Animal Clinic 829 Second St., Radford; 731-1111

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