

## No Kill, The New Goal In Animal Control

by Lynda Crawford

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A red pit bull was brought to the city's animal shelter in the Bronx recently with two broken legs. A shelter official contacted Jane Hoffman from the [Mayor's Alliance for New York City Animals](#), who called a private veterinarian. The vet agreed to examine the animal for free, and do the orthopedic surgery at a reduced rate, which was paid for by a charity set up for this purpose called the [Picasso Fund](#).

If it had been brought in just a year ago, chances are good that the dog -- badly injured, homeless, and thus deemed un-adoptable -- would have been killed.

Last year about 35,000 cats and dogs were reportedly killed at the five shelters run by New York City's [Center for Animal Care and Control](#). At least a third of them were healthy and not dangerous. They were killed -- euthanized, in the parlance of the field -- because there just wasn't room for them. This is the way it has been for decades. Every day, as many as 200 animals -- lost, homeless, unwanted, sick or injured -- are taken to these shelters. By the

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end of every week, about two-thirds of them have been put to death.

But now there is a new vision for the future of New York's cats and dogs. It is expressed in something approaching a slogan – "No kill in NYC by 2008. **FROM KILL TO NO KILL**

There are many reasons why animal shelters got into the business of killing the animals they had rescued from the streets.

- First was simply the overwhelming **overpopulation** of cats and dogs. Estimates put the number of dogs in the city at about a million and a half, and cats at more than two and a half million. Too many thousands of these are homeless animals roaming the city.

- **Inadequate shelters** are also at fault: the population during one month in 2003 was 171 percent of capacity at the Brooklyn shelter, 114 percent of capacity at Manhattan, and 137 percent of capacity in Queens.

- Years with no ambitious **adoption and spay/neuter programs** have contributed as well. An audit by NYC Comptroller William Thompson a couple of years ago found the city's shelter system "does not provide humane conditions for all of the animals in its shelters and has not made aggressive efforts to increase adoptions of homeless animals." Spay-neutering initiatives, to stem the overpopulation, were under-publicized.

- New York City per capita **spending** on animal control is about half the national average.

- And underlying all this was a leadership philosophy that accepted this killing as sad but necessary.

That philosophy began to change nationally in 1989 when a Californian named Ed Duvin wrote an [article](#) condemning euthanasia for healthy adoptable animals in shelters as "massive slaughter" and "an abject failure." The article stirred heated debate and resulted in more and more humane organizations, including the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (the [ASPCA](#)) in New York, distancing themselves from the killing, by leaving it to municipal-run shelters. But this didn't stop the deaths; it only changed who administered them.

The concept of "no kill" began in 1990 at the [San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals](#), which teamed up with the local animal control agency to create programs that encouraged adoption, instituted spay/neutering, reunited pets with owners, and vastly improved the shelters themselves. In 1989, only 38 percent of the animals in the shelters in San Francisco were saved from killing. In 2003, the save rate had increased to 78 percent.

"No kill" does not mean that there will no longer be animals put to death at animal shelters.

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Rather, the goal is not to euthanize any healthy "adoptable" animals. About 20 percent of the animals may be too sick or too dangerous to save, according to the [National Council on Pet Overpopulation](#), and they will continue to be euthanized.

Even the more modest goal of saving healthy adoptable animals will take up to five years to achieve in New York City. **NEW LEADERSHIP**

That "no kill" is now even the official goal in New York is largely due to three people, the city's new generation of leadership in animal care.

### Jane Hoffman: Strategic Alliance

The first is Jane Hoffman, a lawyer who helped found the Animal Law Committee of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, the first such bar association committee in the nation (eight cities and ten states have since followed suit). At the end of 2001, the committee sent a [memo](#) to Mayor-elect Michael Bloomberg, outlining opportunities to improve New York City's policies towards animals. The mayor invited Hoffman to City Hall, a meeting that led to the formation of the Mayor's Alliance for New York City Animals, with Hoffman as its president. "I think what appealed to them" said Hoffman, "is that a lot of people were screaming about this situation, but not offering options. We did."

There are now [50 organizations](#) in the Mayor's Alliance. Their mission is to increase the adoption of shelter animals and increase spay/neutering of cats and dogs, both of which will ultimately help to achieve the third goal: decrease the killing of animals at shelters. These efforts would be paid for by securing a grant from [Maddie's Fund](#), a foundation that supports collaborative no-kill efforts within communities.

### Ed Boks: Emphasizing The "Care" In Animal Care and Control

Hoffman lured Ed Boks to head the Center for Animal Care and Control, which is a non-profit agency created in 1995 under contract with the city to operate the city's animal shelters (taking over from the ASPCA). Boks had gained a reputation in animal control in Maricopa County, Arizona (which includes Phoenix and several other cities), where he had promised that he would not leave until he had made it the first no-kill metropolitan area in the country. But the opportunity to do the same in New York was too strong a siren call. "If we do it in New York, we will rob every other community in the United States of their excuses."

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Boks likes to repeat a saying by Gandhi â€“ “the way you can judge a community is by how they treat their animals. Right now,” Boks says, “how we treat our animals is a cause of tremendous shame. Our shelters are abhorrent.” A former pastor, Boks would like to emphasize the “care” in Animal Care and Control. Since the city cut its funding for the agency from \$8.9 million to \$7.2 million last year, Boks has teamed up with well-known animal advocates such as Mary Tyler Moore to raise additional funds. Boks also hopes to be able to roll out programs that worked in Maricopa County -- he has already initiated one, for feral cats (the “wild” offspring of domestic pets) -- if he can find the funding. “Our job won’t be done until we can develop a safety net for all animals.”

### **Edwin Sayres: Ten Percent Fewer Deaths A Year**

The third new leader passionately committed to “no kill” is Edwin Sayres, the new president of the [ASPCA](#), a national organization founded in 1866 that is headquartered here in the city. Sayres, who has spent three decades working for animal welfare organizations, hopes to lend his expertise as well as the resources of his organization to help New York City reduce its animal euthanasia rate by ten percent a year.

“With Ed Boks here,” said Sayres, “and with what Jane Hoffman is creating with the Mayor’s Alliance, and what I bring to the tableâ€¦it feels like the planets are all in their right alignment. There is strong competency and good spirit, so we have placed more priority on our role in New York.”

The ASPCA has increased its spending in the city to \$15.5 million (up from \$12.5 million last year), and says these resources will be aimed at increasing adoptions, and providing animal behavior training sessions to owners; a large number of pets are surrendered to city shelters because of their behavior problems, many of which could have been corrected. The society will also provide additional hours and more staffing for their mobile unit ( [ASPCA CARES](#) ), which offers on-the-spot spay/neutering in various neighborhoods; last year, the mobile unit performed 7,000 surgeries. ASPCA CARES is free for those on public assistance and for rescue groups, and \$25 for anyone else.

### **PETS TO THE PEOPLE**

Less than 10 percent of the estimated 56,000 animals brought to city shelters last year were adopted. (The fate of the rest: Some were reunited with their owners, and others were transferred to animal rescue groups or private shelters that hold onto them indefinitely if they need to, but it is estimated that at least 60 percent were euthanized). To save more lives, the animal care activists are devising new ways to get these pets to people.

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Last year, the Mayor's Alliance offered five [adoption events](#) at city parks, complete with festive tents, banners, nice display cages, and orange mesh vests for the animals printed with the words "Adopt Me." Three hundred shelter animals were adopted in this way. ( Dates for the 2004 park adoption events are already lined up: Central Park (May 23); Clove Lake Park (Sept. 25); Prospect Park (June 20, Oct. 24).)

Another strategy is to compete with pet stores. Animal Haven, a member of the Mayor's Alliance, partnered with Biscuits & Bath, a dog day care center, to create a [small storefront adoption center](#) on Second Avenue for shelter animals. The window looks just like a pet-store window, except there is a sign that says "Adopt Me." Animal Haven offers lifetime support services, including training for the new owners on care for the animals. "It is an educational opportunity," explained Marcello Forte of Animal Haven. "We want the adoptions to stick." Last year, they were able to place 500 shelter animals this way.

They also operate an adoption van that set up at several heavily trafficked areas. "We're going to the public and bringing the animals," said Forte. "Pets to the people."

Then there is the Pet-Ark, an ATM-like kiosk that helps people locate pets for adoption from within the shelter system. Funded by Mary Tyler Moore and her husband, Dr. Robert Levin, Pet-Arks are now up and running in nine locations and on the [Web](#). The hope is that Pet-Arks will soon be in banks, post offices and even Starbucks.

Available pets can also be reviewed [online](#) through Animal Care and Control

"Adopting from a shelter, the animal is good to go," said Hoffman. "They're spayed/neutered; they have all their shots, and you get some details on the animal. You get a great healthy animal at a portion of the cost. And 20 percent of animals in shelters are purebreds. Buying from a shelter makes you part of the solution." **ALLOWING PETS IN**

### **APARTMENTS**

Sometimes adoption efforts are hindered by "no pet" clauses in tenant leases. If a landlord has a no-pet clause in the lease, but the tenant "openly and notoriously" has the animal for 90 days or more without interference, the landlord waives the right to enforce the law for the life of the pet. If a tenant brings home a new dog after this one dies, however, the 90-day period begins anew.



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A bill introduced last year by City Council Member Melinda Katz would extend that post-90-day grace period through the life of the tenant, rather than the life of the pet. The legislation would also ensure that seniors, 62 and older, would not be denied housing or be subject to eviction on the basis of having pets. A [hearing](#) in December brought many supporters to testify, while a representative from a council of low-income coops spoke against it. Katz will reintroduce the bill this year.

### LOW COST SPAYING AND NEUTERING

Adoption is the first priority because of the high euthanasia rates, but the long-term solution to this problem is widespread low-cost spay/neutering, or "turning off the faucet." The low cost is important. The price to spay or neuter a dog at a vet's office can range from \$85 to \$500 and, for cats, the price fluctuates between \$125 and \$250. The Mayor's Alliance is hoping for a grant that would provide six million dollars for spaying and neutering animals in low-income families.

Over half the membership of The Veterinary Medical Association of New York City ([VMA/ NYC](#)) agreed to offer their services to spay/neuter up to six animals a year for no more than \$20 for anyone on public assistance, with the remainder of their fee being paid from the grant.

Jay Kuhlman, a veterinarian for 34 years (and the doctor who treated the pit bull with two broken legs), sees low cost spay/neutering as essential to avoiding the high rates of euthanasia. Veterinarians could be helping more, he thinks, by posting signs and talking to their customers. "We the people have done this. And we can decrease it." **RESCUING STREET CATS**

Bryan Kortis, a documentary filmmaker, was on his way home to his two cats on Manhattan's Upper West Side in 1999 when he happened upon what he thought was a single kitten in an empty lot, and he stopped to see if he could help; maybe he could handle one more addition to his home. It turned out not to be one kitten, but several. Indeed, there were 30 cats there, most of them under a year old. This he couldn't handle. Kortis tried calling all over the city to get someone to take care of the cats, only to find that there was no humane organization in existence that dealt with street cats. He realized that if wanted someone to help these cats, he was going to have to do it. In that instant, [Neighborhood Cats](#) came into existence.

Kortis learned about trap-neuter-return (TNR) -- a humane feral cat colony management program -- from the [Alley Cat Allies](#). The program involves trapping feral cats, preferably the whole colony at once, and bringing them to a vet for spay/neutering. Kittens are rescued and brought to shelters, hopefully for adoption, and adult cats are returned to where they were found, but monitored and fed from this point forward by volunteer guardians.

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"There are tens of thousands of feral cats in New York City," said Kortis. "Maybe hundreds of thousands. Half of the kittens coming into city shelters are street cats. Three to four thousand animals a month are being euthanized and most of them are cats. If we can't stop the flow of these kittens going into shelters, we're not going to be able to stop the euthanasia rates."

Neighborhood Cats initially concentrated on the Upper West Side, with remarkable results: in four years, he says, the number of stray cats from the neighborhood going into shelters dropped by 73 percent. Now, they operate throughout the city, have completed some high-profile operations at Riker's Island and Fresh Kills, and conduct workshops and courses.

The goal of Neighborhood Cats is that euthanasia becomes "what it was meant to be," said Kortis, "the mercy killing of beings that are mortally ill and suffering, and nothing else." **A**

### **CARING AND LICENSING -- COMMUNITY**

"The best shelter is a caring community," said Boks, who is promoting responsible pet ownership, which includes not just spaying and neutering, but also getting a license for your dog. Dogs with licenses who wind up in a shelter "go home," said Boks. Those who are not wearing tags "don't go home. It is the single most prevalent reason for animals dying in shelters."

Hoffman also recommends microchip identification for pets, a tiny implantable chip that is injected into the skin; shelters and veterinarians now all have scanners to read these IDs. "If the license falls off, they still have the microchip."

They are also encouraging New Yorkers to "foster" a litter for 30 days, or to volunteer at an animal shelter. There are programs with schools to teach children to care, and even programs with banks: Negotiations are currently in progress with JP Morgan Chase to encourage employees to adopt pets from shelters by covering the fees.

Jane Hoffman is optimistic that no kill is a reachable goal. Adoptions, she points out, nearly doubled last year from the year before. "Our hope is that at some point we can save them all," she said.

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"It's up to the community," said Ed Boks.