

Pets, Pets, Pets- by Joanne Anderson BEACON 10/19/06

Spaying and neutering pets prior to adoption is the only way to ensure that these animals won't add to the staggering pet overpopulation problem. Bonds, vouchers, and certificates are not a sure thing. All municipal shelters in Nassau and Suffolk, with the *exception* of Babylon Town Shelter, now perform mandatory altering before the animals go to new homes. Even NYC shelters have made great strides via the Mayor's Alliance and Maddie's Fund. Hopefully, Babylon will become proactive ASAP. Despite many years of preaching, I blame myself, in part, for not being able to convince my Town Hall how crucial mandatory spay/neuter is to block future animal suffering and expense to taxpayers.

Some somber statistics: *an unspayed cat, her mate, and their offspring, producing 2 litters a year ,can total 11.6 million cats in 9 years... one unspayed dog and her pups can produce 67 thousand dogs in 6 years (Spay USA)...7 dogs and cats are born everyday for each person born in the US. Only 1 in 5 of theses stay in their original home for their lifetime (HSUS) ...The cost of having a pregnant female can be higher than the cost of spaying... In a '97 survey of 1038 US shelters, over 56% of the dogs and 71% of the cats surrendered were euthanized.....It cost shelters approximately \$100 to capture, house, feed, and eventually kill each homeless animal. (Doris Day Animal League)*

Reputable non-profit groups always require animals to be castrated before placement. Municipals rarely offered this "bonus" in the past. Hempstead Shelter was the latest to send adopted animals to a vet to be altered. That leaves Babylon as the only LI municipal shelter still using the \$35 NYS neuter bond which does little to encourage compliance.

The other LI pounds accomplish mandatory spay/neuter for adopted animals in a variety of ways. Some transport the animals to the cooperating vet (hired by contract or, in rare cases, pro bono), and the new owners either pick up their pet at the hospital or the shelter; some have vets perform the operations at clinics adjoining the shelter. Certain Towns allow early castrations on puppies and kittens, at least 8 weeks or 2 pounds; while others collect the neuter fee in full and require the infant pet to come back when 6 months old for the traditional spay/neuter. Fees vary by Town, but include rabies shots for animals over 3 months and NYS licenses for dogs

Some shelter specifics: Brookhaven is fortunate to have an animal hospital next door. The Town has a contract with a vet there. Residents can also bring their pets for low cost spay/neuter. Oyster Bay also uses a bid. The shelter delivers all adopted animals to the designated hospital. Surgeries are performed there; already castrated animals are verified; and owners pick up their new dog or cat at that vet. Southold sends their dogs/cats to one of 2 cooperating clinics, and even puts registered microchips in the pet. Huntington has a combined municipal/non-profit effort, also a separate dog and cat shelter, with the League for Animal Protection volunteers working out of the 2 Town shelters. No adopted pet leaves without being altered first.

Thanks to the perseverance of director Matt Caracciolo, Islip Shelter now has a spay clinic in a trailer next to the shelter. The Town and VCA Animal Hospitals work as a team. The Town bought the trailer, pays utilities, and hired a vet tech and kennel aide. VCA owns the medical equipment and provides a veterinarian for spay/neuter twice a week. They share the cost of supplies. As a follow up, VCA offers a free first exam at any of their 8 hospitals on LI. A similar plan could work beautifully at Babylon Shelter too, plus it would also solve their time consuming problem of having ACOs transport every animal- even owner redemptions- to a hospital for rabies shot. A vet, a vet tech- a wish come true.

Oct. '01 NYS passed a law giving municipal shelters 2 choices: either neuter the adopted animal before it leaves, or charge a state \$35 bond to be refunded when the owner shows proof of surgery. Unclaimed money went into a fund that financed state low cost certificates. Participating vets would

perform spay/neuters for about \$30. These certificates are a well-guarded secret. The vets are few and far between. I've seen one used in 5 years. As of 10/15/06 new, unclear rules state that now the owner has to apply to Albany for a voucher and supply proof of financial need, like food stamps. How many are going to take the time to do that?

I also blame the State for coming up with a perfunctory option that doesn't curb overpopulation. It's paperwork heavy with little benefit. Responsible owners will neuter whether there is a bond (which isn't deducted from the surgery cost) or not. You have only 2 months to comply. I've asked vets for extension notes for rescued dogs with heartworm. Many folks will hear a neutering price of \$100+, especially on a big dog, and opt to forfeit the \$35. In our "throw-away" society, some will return Mama and her pups/kittens to the pound. If shelters neuter for you, one price fits all- Yorkie to St. Bernard. When the law first passed, I called the State Attorney to see if owners would still have to pay the bond on strays that appeared neutered but didn't have vet proof. He said they hadn't thought of that, and he'd get back to me. I'm still waiting.

Uninformed critics- including those who never set foot in a pound- often make comments, disparaging Town shelters, labeling them good or bad. You can't compare the animal problems of a huge Town to a small one, or impoverished areas to those of the affluent. I'm quick to defend Babylon Shelter which serves residents of all incomes. For 24 years I've watched a small staff, without a vet or vet tech, try to help countless, neglected animals. As a former educator in a hard-working, lower socio-economic district, I resent these shelter rankings, as I do the berating of students' test scores in poor communities. Animal control is similar in that neighborhoods and tax bases feeding into the shelters determine the number and condition of animals arriving, and the money available for programs.

In May '05 Babylon Town Hall announced that Assemblyman Sweeney obtained a \$35,000 state grant for spay/neuter of feral cats and improvements at the shelter. I may be mistaken, but I don't think the money has arrived yet. It's time that Babylon become as progressive as the rest of LI and NYC, and devise a plan for mandatory spay/neuter of all adopted shelter animals before release. Let's get started now. I may be mistaken again, but I think that Babylon Town Hall is open to suggestions and help from other Town shelters, humane groups, and me- that disappointed, defensive preacher.

The dogs and cats at Babylon Town Shelter (643-9270) Lamar St. W. Babylon want to go to a forever home in time to Trick or Treat. "Peanut" in C-4 is a 3 year old spayed, declawed tabby who put up with the clown hat although it was beneath her feline dignity, whereas "Rapunzel" was an eager princess. She loved the purple wig. This friendly Pit mix in Cage 51 appears to have had it tough- head scars, worn teeth, and the tell tale belly of several litters. Note: The shelter does offer certificates redeemable for \$50 spay/neuters at North Shore Animal League. Surgeries used to be free. There's no way of knowing how many are actually used- driving to Port Washington and waiting lists have been given as excuses not to neuter.

Males: "Cappuccino"- the amiable Akita in Cage 43. He let 2 of us rake out his mats at the same time; a Cocker Spaniel in Cage 67; "Denzel"- a neut. kitten in C-2.

Females: "Angel"- a sweet Chow/Lab in Cage 49; a Lab/Pit mix found abandoned by N. Babylon Library in Cage 91; "Betty Boop"- last week's adorable calico in C-7.

****Job Opportunity:** Babylon Shelter is looking for a seasonal full time kennel attendant-\$7.50 an hour. Ask for Ed Buturla. Sure would love to see someone with animal handling experience or an interest in a future veterinary career apply.

