

Pets, Pets, Pets by Joanne Anderson BEACON 6/25/09

A “Grim” but true feline fairy tale “*Once upon a time on a far away long island there were two towns named Hempstead. Both towns had plenty of homeless cats. The first town, simply called Hempstead, welcomed cats into its shelter already packed with dogs. At last count there were 97 cats and kittens being cared for there. The other wealthier town called North Hempstead slammed its doors to all cats even though its shelter had only a handful of dogs. The poor creatures were left to fend for themselves. Few lived happily ever after.*”

If you are reincarnated as a feline, stay out of North Hempstead. The Town of North Hempstead Shelter in Port Washington does not accept cats and has not done so for at least ten years, merely because they don't have to by NYS law. To exclude cats from a town shelter is absurd as a public school that won't admit boys. It's beyond belief that North Hempstead's educated and affluent residents (household median income over \$95,000) plus animal lovers everywhere continue to stand for this.

I usually defend Long Island municipal shelters because I see the progress they have made over the last thirty years. However, this criticism is long overdue, and two recent developments- a misleading 5/10 article in *Newsday* “*Haven at last for unwanted cats*” and North Hempstead's refusal last week to help Nassau SPCA shelter the 40 cats taken from an Albertson hoarder- force clarification. Bottom line: North Hempstead's cat policies lack common sense and compassion.

Let me start by saying I've only been to N. Hempstead Shelter once, last year for a planning meeting of the Pit Bull Symposium. I saw the **hole in the ground** that for ten years was supposed to become the cat shelter, but for this query no one at the Town except for the “public information officer” would speak to me. I've yet to receive the answers to my questions- only a vague response that they *might* begin working on getting new bids at the end of 2009. Bottom line: The Town is stalling and placating. They don't need a separate cat shelter. They could start small by resurrecting their old cat room or converting space within the kennels/ garage to take in cats for adoption or to reunite with guardians like N. Hempstead used to do.

As for the great black hole, *Newsday* was much too hopeful about a change of heart but did state that the cat shelter was never finished because the construction company sued for alleged non-payment. In April the Town Board authorized a \$130,000 case settlement. All this money yet still no space for cats? Bottom line: At even \$50 per spay, think about how many cats N. Hempstead could have spayed for \$130,000.

Town Supervisor Jon Kaiman's statement in *Newsday* “We don't want to become the euthanasia center for cats....That's usually the primary function of cat shelters” is rubbish. Any cat advocate who buys into this bogus claim is helping the Supervisor to delay.

As a wise lady who knows more about running an animal shelter than I ever will said, “We need solidarity in the cat community. Otherwise officials shirk their responsibilities and hold us hostage to our love of animals.” Other LI towns are sheltering, medicating, spay/neutering and placing hundreds of adoptable cats. Due to space, intake is selective and staggered. Brookhaven is pre-vaccinating waiting cats before admission. Most towns also have a TNR (Trap Neuter Return) plan for ferals.

It is kitten season so numbers fluctuate daily but I conducted an unofficial cat/kitten census. As of June 17<sup>th</sup> the totals in Nassau and Suffolk town shelters ranged from 39 to 125. “Despite our small size, the Animal Lovers League (ALL), the municipal shelter for the City of Glen Cove, not only shelters cats but has for years provided free feral cat spay/neuter clinics in-house to address rampant breeding,” stated Joan Philips, ALL co-founder. Bottom line: While dog intake is tied to socio-economics; cat overpopulation is ubiquitous, even outside mansions, even behind Town Hall. Somehow N. Hempstead Shelter doesn't see them and still has zero cats.

Since 2003 North Hempstead's only cat service has been a perfunctory, mutating TNR program. Their total amount sterilized is a drop in the bucket. They hired a part time TNR program coordinator (why?) and contracted for trapping and altering cats with two private rescues -HUGS and Last Hope (which like the construction company is in a dispute for thousands of dollars' surgical reimbursement). *Newsday* claims N. Hempstead held TNR clinics but that never happened.

TNR is not the whole cat picture. N. Hempstead ignores previously owned cats and lost cats in need. Besides, an essential component of successful TNR is removing the kittens and tame adults out of the colonies and placing them into homes. N. Hempstead's refusal to take these or surrendered pet cats adds to their Town's surplus because highly adoptable cats (and consequently their progeny) are often abandoned when residents have no recourse. Bottom line: The N. Hempstead problem mushrooms; then spills into neighboring areas and private rescues. Other groups pick up the slack and become N. Hempstead's virtual shelter.

Hoarder situations, like the Albertson cat house, are common and complex. The SPCA seized 40 cats that N. Hempstead flatly refused to take. The SPCA investigates and removes the animals, but it is the Town shelter's responsibility to house the seized animals as a triage center while they are evaluated for disease, age and sociability. Then they can reach out to private rescues for some assistance. Meanwhile the Town, social work agencies, SPCA, and Board of Health must monitor the home and former owner for the sake of the neighbors and to keep the offender from repeating this cycle of animal abuse.

N. Hempstead's shelter director, Sue Hassett, has been there about 30 years. She prides herself on her Shelter Connection (volunteer) program for her minimal dog population. However, during her tenure she has allowed the eyesore of a hole to suffice as a cat shelter. She could have appealed to the Town and Supervisor Kaiman for a change of feline policy. They could have instituted a Cat Shelter Connection. She and the Supervisor chose not to do so. Instead they chose to treat cats as pariahs.

It's an election year. Cats don't vote, yet animal lovers do. Let Supervisor Kaiman (516- 869-6311 or kaimanj@northhempstead.com) know that. Keep reminding him. Bottom line: Maybe he'll open the slammed doors to cats before the polls open.

**Closer to home- for Adoption at Babylon Town Shelter (643-9270) Lamar St .W. Babylon.**  
"Lucy" #19847, a 5 yr. old white spayed beauty is 1 of 7 cats to lose her home due to an eviction- (another sad scenario ignored by the N. Hempstead's no-cat policy).

More Cats: "Skitz" affable tabby; "Carly" calico declaw plus 59 more.

Male Dogs: Brussels Griffon mix; Beagle Cage 1; Golden Ret. mix Cage 2; "Phelps"- canal swimming Retriever Cage 5.

Female Dogs: Chow Cage 27; "Tyra"- Rottie mix Cage 42; "Hallie"- longest resident Pit Cage 38; senior Dobie Cage 44.