



Shelters face tough dilemma: More abandoned animals, fewer donations

Lynn Taylor Rick, Journal staff | Posted: Thursday, May 21, 2009 11:00 pm

Since the economy took a turn south, the Twin City Animal Shelter serving Deadwood and Lead has seen twice the number of people in need of food for their pets, and Western Hills Humane Society in Spearfish has had more abandoned animals than ever before.

Teah Pray of the Twin City Animal Shelter said the facility now spends between \$200 and \$300 a month alone on dog and cat food to be donated to families. "That's about double," Pray said. Donations are also down. "I do the thank you notes, and trust me, I haven't written as many thank you notes," she said. "It's very, very tough."

Char Krogstad, director of the Western Hills Humane Society, agrees that pet owners are in a bind. "I've never seen a year like this," she said.

The Western Hills shelter has been full with about 22 dogs for the past four months. In the past, it was more likely that the shelter would have only six or seven dogs. "It's never been that way before," she said.

Krogstad said more pets are being abandoned on the streets and not claimed after they've been rescued. The shelter does its best to place them in homes, but it is becoming harder.

Both Krogstad and Pray blame the economy for the trend. "The economy is definitely affecting those things," Pray said.

The economy seems to be also affecting pet owners' abilities to spay and neuter their pets, Pray said. That's something the shelter works hard to support. The shelter pays 100 percent of pet spaying and neutering for low-income pet owners in Deadwood and Lead, and 50 percent for those in the surrounding area. The shelter has seen a surge in that program.

"They see the need for spaying or neutering, but they simply can't afford that, and they do call - and they do call a lot," she said.

Donna Watson, president of the South Dakota West River Spay/Neuter Coalition in Deadwood, said the free clinics that the coalition offers are being overwhelmed.

She recently received 75 calls after placing one small advertisement in the Rapid City Journal about a free clinic. "They can't afford it. It's \$150 to do a female cat now," she said. "A lot of people just don't have the money."

Since spaying and neutering pets is such a critical component of keeping populations under control, the trend concerns Watson and Pray. They hope that despite the financial challenges, pet owners will continue to find ways to ensure pets are spayed and neutered and given proper medical care.

"The name of the game is to help the animals," Krogstad said. "It's not their fault."

A call to the Humane Society of the Black Hills in Rapid City was not returned by deadline.

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