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Henry hires head for animal shelter

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Henry County has hired a new director for its troubled animal shelter.

Gerri Dueringer, who had been Rockdale County's animal shelter director, accepted Henry's offer to manage its facility.

Dueringer's mission is two-fold. She is being asked to lower the county's euthanasia rate and to improve conditions in the shelter. State officials have quarantined portions of the shelter twice in six weeks.

County Manager Rob Magnaghi said Dueringer was hired because of her management skills, knowledge of animal shelter issues and personality.

"We were impressed with her understanding and philosophy in animal shelters. She will be a good asset for us."

The shelter was previously part of the code enforcement division, so the county did not have a shelter director. County officials plan to create a separate department for the shelter.

Dueringer's résumé includes 20 years' experience with Rockdale's Animal Care and Control and as a board member of the Conyers/Rockdale Humane Society. She won an award from the National Association of Counties for creating a program to provide pets to senior citizens. As Rockdale shelter director, Dueringer said she tripled the reputable rescue organizations that adopted animals from the shelter.

But according to one organization, the Rockdale shelter's euthanasia rate was above the Atlanta region's average.

In 2003, Rockdale's euthanasia rate was 73.4 percent, according to the most recent data compiled by Stopping Pet Overpopulation Together, an organization that tracks such data. The euthanasia rate for the Atlanta region was 62.8 percent. Henry County's euthanasia rate was 73.3 percent, the organization's figures show. Clayton County's was 74.5 percent.

State officials quarantined the Henry shelter in late December upon finding many problems, including failure to treat injuries in cats, improper euthanasia methods, dogs walking on chemical-stained floors, inadequate cleaning procedures and improper ventilation.

The quarantine was lifted in early January. After a dog adopted Jan. 23 died six days later, state officials inspected the facility and quarantined more than 90 dogs inside the shelter last Wednesday.

State Agriculture Commissioner Tommy Irvin, whose department oversees animal control inspections, thinks the primary problem in Henry is that workers pick up diseased strays that infect other animals.

"I think it would be great if there were more areas where they can segregate the animals."

Henry County officials opened the current shelter last March.

Irvin said the quarantine would remain in effect until Henry officials asked for a reinspection.

Dueringer was scheduled to start work last Monday. Her starting salary will be \$37,000, Magnaghi said.

Last week, eight dogs, mostly pit bulls, were euthanized at the shelter to provide more space for other animals, county officials said. Richard Puckett, a member of an animal protection group in Henry, accused county officials of not giving rescue groups enough time to

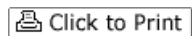
get the animals adopted. County spokeswoman Julie Hoover-Ernst said the county reached out to several rescue groups but that none was able to adopt the dogs.

"We're moving to [a low-kill facility], but we will never be no-kill," she said.

Magnaghi has asked Dueringer to develop a set of policies and procedures for the shelter in six months.

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