



Home News Entertainment Communities Classifieds Coupons Homes Cars Jobs Customer Service

Archive (1999-)

SEARCH



For the Best Service & Selection in Central NY! FREE Cushion with purchase

verizonw the best na wireless ne in amer click her BEST NETWORK ON RELIABILITY RE OUR STUDIES REL BEST NETWORK AT

- Home
News
Local News
Archives
Local Sports
Lifestyle
Elections
Nation/World
Obituaries
Celebrations
Opinion
Technology
Space & Science
Weather
Entertainment
Communities
Classifieds
Coupons
Homes
Cars
Jobs
Customer Service

Opinion - Saturday, July 10, 2004

SUBSCRIBE TO THE ITHACA JOURNAL

'Ithacanize' other shelters nationwide

NATHAN WINOGRAD

GUEST COLUMNIST

I started at the Tompkins County SPCA on June 11, 2001, a little over three years ago. On June 12, we ran out of space. Every cat cage, every dog kennel had a meowing or barking face in it. That afternoon, we opened our doors to the public at noon and in walked a couple with a litter of puppies, unplanned and unwanted.

A staff member asked me which animals were going to be killed to make room for the new ones.

This is the scenario that is played out in every community in the United States. Shelter administrators and directors from coast-to-coast use different criteria for answering the problem. Some will kill the oldest, others the pets which have been at the shelter the longest; some go by color or breed. The question almost always includes a list of the unlucky animals whose time is up. The numbers can become staggering: Last year, 4.5 million dogs and cats lost their lives in our nation's shelters.

So when I returned the question with a question of my own: "What is Plan B?" I was met with a blank stare. There was none. "That is the way it has always been done," I was told.

So I gave them a Plan B.

We took a horse trough that was sitting in the storage room gathering dust, put the puppies in it and displayed them in the lobby. What better way to showcase those little gems and give them the socialization which they also desperately needed?

On June 13, we come up with Plan B for cats and kittens. Within a month we were taking in over 200 cats and kittens a month and about 100 dogs and puppies. With every crisis of space, we struggled our way to Plan B. In other words, we had successfully taken killing off of the table.

Then winter came, the snow fell and the numbers of unwanted pets fell to a trickle. We closed our doors on December 31 and finished the year having

reduced the death rate by over 50 percent. By the end of 2002, we had saved each and every healthy and treatable pet -- the first and only community to do so. By 2003 we had the lowest death rate in the country. In 2004, we opened the nation's premier pet adoption center.

Three years ago, it started with a litter of puppies in a horse trough. Today, it involves foster care for close to 900 pets each year, a volunteer core that puts in over 12,000 hours each year caring for shelter pets, a new state-of-the-art shelter and a 93 percent adoption and save rate -- over eight times the national average and better than any other community in the nation.

Our programs, services and accomplishments have not gone unnoticed. The Tompkins County SPCA has been written about in national magazines and newspapers, talked about at national conferences and next month our success will be lauded in an upcoming book by award winning author Ellen Perry Berkeley. But more than that, our shelter has become a beacon of hope for the 4.5 million dogs and cats who face certain death in animal shelters every year. If every community in the U.S. did what we did, 4.1 million of those dogs and cats would find in their shelter a new beginning, instead of the end of the line.

So the next great challenge for our movement is to instill the principles, dedication, compassion, programs and services that make Ithaca the small town with the big heart into the status quo of sheltering around the country. We need to "Ithacan-ize" other animal shelters so that the light we cast here shines near and far, to every community, every city, every town, every hamlet from coast-to-coast.

At the end of the summer, I will turn over the helm of this agency to a new director. In place to guarantee our continued success are a dedicated staff, a committed volunteer core, an army of supporters, an energized board of directors and an entire community that has, time and time again, rallied around our mission.

In short, our continued success and national prominence is ensured by the animal-loving citizens of this great community. The future looks very bright indeed. Not only for the homeless animals of Tompkins County, but for those who we give hope to around the country.

As I move down ("move on" is quite the wrong term after going from the number-one shelter in the country to a community that still has killing on the table) to try and help animals elsewhere, I want to express my gratitude to all of you: to every Good Samaritan, every pet lover, every supporter, adopter, volunteer, foster parent, every reporter and everybody who in some way, great or small, opened up his or her heart, home or wallet to help save the life of an SPCA animal.

Together, we have created the safest community in the United States for homeless dogs and cats. We have built a pet adoption center unlike any other in the country. And we have electrified America with our can-do attitude and results-oriented philosophy. Thank you Tompkins County for making "Plan B" such an unqualified success.

There are those who believed that the policy of killing homeless animals could never be changed. But we have proved them wrong. I hope you are as proud as I am -- of the role we have played in making it happen here, and in paving the way for the rest of the nation to follow.

--

Winograd has been director of the Tompkins County SPCA since June, 2001.

 [Email this story](#)

Originally published Saturday, July 10, 2004

<p>Make life easier and fun! For home delivery click or call 607-274-9290</p>	
--	---

[Home](#) | [News](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Communities](#) | [Customer Service](#)
[Classifieds](#) | [Coupons](#) | [Homes](#) | [Cars](#) | [Jobs](#)



[Contact Us](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Place an ad](#)
Copyright ©2004 The Ithaca Journal. All rights reserved.
Use of this site indicates your agreement to the [Terms of Service](#)
(Terms updated 12/20/02)

