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Friday, January 3, 2003

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Tompkins SPCA boasts lowest kill rate in U.S.

By **DAN HIGGINS**

Journal Staff

ITHACA -- Tompkins County's SPCA is the safest place to be a homeless dog or cat, according to a national publication that tracks euthanasia statistics.

The journal Animal People said Ithaca ranked No. 1 in the nation with the lowest per-capita rate for dogs and cats being put down in animal shelters.

In 2002, the Tompkins County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals took in 2,454 dogs and cats, and killed 185 of them, which works out to around 1.9 dogs and cats per 1,000 people.

Compare that to the national average of 15 destroyed dogs and cats per thousand, said Animal People editor Merritt Clifton, and Ithaca is leading the pack when it comes to animal protection.

"It works when you have an aggressive, low-cost pet sterilization program, a relatively affluent community and a dynamic executive director," said Clifton.

Shelter survey

Ithaca rated No. 1 in a survey compiled by the journal Animal People, in lowest number of euthanized animals per 1,000 people. The geographic areas include both cities and states. Animal People editor Merritt Clifton said the geographical areas surveyed were kept together based on whether they had the same methods for retrieving and testing stray or abandoned animals.

Place Dogs and Cats destroyed deaths per 1,000 people

Ithaca/Tompkins County	185	1.9
New Hampshire	2,575	2.2
San Francisco	1,942	2.6
New York City	36,500	4.6
New Jersey	48,551	5.8
San Diego	16,463	5.8
Maine	8,000	6.3
Rochester	4,511	6.3
Colorado	119,340	8.3
Missoula, MT	748	8.4
Buffalo/Erie		

Executive Director Nathan Winograd said Thursday that becoming a "no-kill" shelter depends on having enough motivated volunteers, and enough financial resources.

County	7,871	8.5
United States	4.4 million	15.5

Source: Animal People

"I didn't do this. Twelve employees didn't do this. An entire compassionate community did this," Winograd said.

He said another reason why the proportion of destroyed animals was so low was the local shelter's decision to find homes for animals with treatable medical problems.

Often, shelters are forced to kill animals with treatable diseases or injuries because they lack the resources for veterinary care.

Winograd said that Cornell University, home of a world-renowned school of Veterinary Medicine, helped treat sick animals. But it has been the grassroots efforts of local vets that made that part of his program work.

He said that in the past year veterinarians with private practices in Tompkins County volunteered time at the animal shelter on a rotating basis, providing care to ill and injured animals.

"We found homes for the 'cute and cuddlies,' but we also found homes for the 'old and uglies' too," Winograd said.

Winograd joined the Tompkins County SPCA in 1999, coming from the San Francisco SPCA. That city was the first in the nation to stop killing healthy dogs and cats.

One of the keys to making that system work locally, Winograd said, was expanding this shelter's network of

volunteers and "foster homes," homes where people agree to temporarily care for shelter animals until they can find a permanent placement.

In 2002, volunteers in Tompkins County provided foster homes for more than 800 dogs and cats.



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