

# TwinCities.com

## Pet rescue missions only run south to north

**Animal advocates say bringing animals north just perpetuates the problem**

By Bob Shaw  
bshaw@pioneerpress.com

Updated: 07/20/2009 12:00:10 AM CDT  
For anything with paws, Stillwater, Minn., and Sallisaw, Okla., look very different.

The two cities are comparable in size, but the Sallisaw animal control department is staffed by one man.

He can legally kill a captured pet after a three-day period. He can use a gas chamber, lethal injection or bullet. He has no spay/neuter program, so he is constantly overrun with excess animals.

Stillwater has few strays, thanks to a long tradition of sterilizing pets. It sends unwanted animals to a group with an \$11 million annual budget and nine on-staff veterinarians.

Those differences are triggering a quiet stampede of animals — from southern towns like Sallisaw to Minnesota towns like Stillwater.

The South's pet population is high partly because animals breed more quickly in warm climates. But it is also because of the Land of Dixie's laid-back attitudes about animal breeding — while Minnesota is the land of population control.

A growing number of critics point out that the Twin Cities metro area kills about 20,000 unwanted pets

per year. But no Southern rescue groups ever come north to save them.

Should the roads in the nationwide rescue network only run from south to north?

"We are perpetuating their problem. Rather than put a Band-aid on it, we should encourage them to grow their own spay/neuter programs," said Mike Fry, director of the Animal Ark No-Kill Shelter in Hastings.

"A dollar spent transporting is a dollar not spent on spay/neuter."

Others say the backward policies of Southern states require intervention — until the attitudes change.

"In the South, they don't need to feel accountable for their animals. It is horrible," said Cheryl Anderson, a volunteer with Minnesota Boxer Rescue, which is based in Woodbury.

"I talked to one shelter, and they said all they had was 14 dog runs, a desk and a gas chamber."

"The South today is like us 10 years ago," said Janelle Dixon, director of the Animal Humane Society of Golden Valley.

If that sounds condescending, well, some of the harshest critics of the South are people who live there.

Debi Boies of Landrum, S.C., is the co-founder of Pilots N Paws, which organizes airborne cross-country animal rescues. She said efforts have failed to teach Southerners to sterilize their pets.

"You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink," she said. "Some of these people down here just aren't educated."

Advertisement



**USF**  
UNIVERSITY of  
SAN FRANCISCO

### End-to-End Training as It Should Be: 100% ONLINE!

#### Earn Your Master Certificate in Internet Marketing

→ SEO & Paid Search

→ Online Branding

→ Web Analytics

→ Internet Law

→ Media Buying

→ Social Media

➔ 1-800-268-9943

USanFranOnline.com/FD

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

# TwinCities.com

The problem isn't a shortage of compassion, she said, but misplaced compassion. Boies said Southern men identify with their dogs so strongly that they wince at the idea of "fixing" a male dog.

They wouldn't want to be neutered themselves, she said, "so they have the dog run around and breed with everything it can."

## MUNICIPAL PUPPY MILL

Consider the fate of animals in Sallisaw versus Stillwater.

Randy Freeman is the Sallisaw animal control officer and the pastor of a local church — both full-time jobs.

Captured animals get a three-day grace period. "Then they are pretty much euthanized unless someone happens to drop by and wants to adopt one out," said Freeman. "It's a one-time deal."

They die by lethal injection. Until 2005, Sallisaw used a gas chamber.

The 30-dog city pound has no money for testing for diseases, such as heartworm.

With no money for spay/neuter programs, there is no end in sight for the population boom — making Sallisaw a kind of municipal puppy mill.

"We are pretty much overwhelmed," said Freeman.

And cats?

The area is overrun with them. But euthanasia isn't an issue. No one bothers.

"We do not think of cats down here," said Connie Guthrie, of nearby Gore, Okla., the founder of Save

Our Strays animal rescue. "They all just die."

## LOVING HOMES

In contrast, Stillwater looks like pet heaven.

Thanks to years of spay-neuter drives, strays are rare. Most pets are in loving homes and off the streets, said Community Service Officer Cindy Jacobson.

The few animals she does pick up go to a shelter in Woodbury — part of the huge Animal Humane Society network, which returns or adopts out about 18,000 animals a year. The number of euthanasias is well below the national average.

"I think we do very well here," Jacobson said.

## NORTH IS SOUTH'S SOLUTION

Ironically, Sallisaw can now boast that its euthanasia rate is only half Minnesota's — because it ships so many dogs north.

The Sallisaw rate has plummeted from 80 percent to 20 percent in only five years. Freeman said that one woman gets the credit for that — Tina Holman, president of the Forever Friends Humane Society in Sallisaw.

Her group shipped 1,000 dogs to northern states in the past six months alone, 67 to Minnesota.

"We are overrun with unwanted animals. Rather than watch them die, we reach out to other groups. They have been wonderful," Holman said.

Her annual budget? "We do not have one," Holman said. She pays expenses herself. At times, she said, she has 50 or 60 puppies in her house or her one-acre yard.

Advertisement



**Florida Tech**  
UNIVERSITY ONLINE

**Bring the Classroom to Your Home**  
With a Degree Online From Florida Tech



**APPLY TODAY!**  
FloridaTechOnline.com/FD | 1-888-253-5946



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

# TwinCities.com

Several Minnesota animal welfare groups are overrun with dogs themselves. Would Holman ever consider a rescue mission to the north?

Impossible, she said. "There is never a time when we could take animals from anyone."

Guthrie runs the Save Our Strays transport service that Holman uses. Guthrie admitted that having Minnesota act as a safety valve enables Oklahoma towns to stay stuck in the past.

But when confronted with the constant reality of dogs facing death, she doesn't think about promoting spay/neuter rules.

"I tell people not to waste their time. Just help those animals get out. We need to take them where people want them," said Guthrie.

"This is the only way. We are in a county with no Humane Society, no building for a pound, no nothing," she said.

"We have nothing here in Oklahoma. Nothing except nice, good dogs."

Bob Shaw can be reached at 651-228-5433.

Advertisement



**Florida Tech**  
UNIVERSITY ONLINE

## Bring the Classroom to Your Home With a Degree Online From Florida Tech



**APPLY TODAY!**  
FloridaTechOnline.com/FD | 1-888-253-5946



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™