

The No Kill Advocate

A No Kill nation is within our reach

Issue #5 2007

The King of Redemptions

Since January 1, adoptions have doubled in Washoe County (Reno), NV and the death rate has been cut in half. With more animals going home alive than ever before, the combined effort of the Nevada Humane Society and Washoe County Animal Services (WCAS) is fast making Reno one of the safest communities for homeless animals in the U.S.

With the Nevada Humane Society adopting out more animals than ever (800 last month alone), Washoe County Animal Services is putting up some impressive numbers of their own as well.

Year to date, 54% of stray dogs have been reclaimed by families. That's the best redemption rate for dogs in the U.S. While only 6% of cats have been redeemed, most communities are posting only 1-3% rates, so that is six times better than many communities.

More animals going home in the field means less animals entering the shelter. And more being redeemed mean less animals needing adoption.

The end result is that less than 10% of animals are losing their lives in Washoe County shelters. That puts them at the top tier of shelters nationwide. What makes Washoe County Animal Services so successful at redemptions? We asked Mitch Schneider, Field Supervisor of WCAS, for his top tips, in hopes that other communities will be successful too. And according to Mitch Schneider, it all starts in the field.

No Kill Advocacy Center: Why is WCAS so successful at having strays redeemed?



Mitch Schneider: It starts in the field. In order to reduce the intake of these animals, something that benefits everyone, officers make every reasonable effort (check for ID, scan for a microchip, talk to area residents, etc.) to return animals to their rightful owners rather than impounding them at our facility.

NKAC: Do you have time to do that?

Mitch: We are very busy in the field. To give you some idea of our service levels, during the last fiscal year our officers responded to over 11,000 stray dog calls-for-service, of which 6,000 of these dogs were impounded. However, while it might be more work initially to try to find where these animals live for the officers in the field, it is less work for staff back at the shelter. It evens out in the end. It means less animals entering the shelter and more animals going home alive. It is a win-win outcome.

NKAC: So you are very successful at getting animals back home in the field. What happens if you can't find the owner and the animal comes to the shelter, do you wait for an owner to call or come forward?

Mitch: No. We are very proactive from start to finish. If we are unable to return the animal to the owner and the animal must be impounded, the officers make an effort to determine who the owner is and

notify the owner that the animal is at our facility; speaking with people in the area in which the animal is found can be very helpful in determining where the pet lives.

NKAC: What else do you do?

Mitch: Impounded animals are photographed during the intake process and their pictures are uploaded to PetHarbor.com so citizens looking for their lost animal can check our facility from any computer that has internet access; if they don't have internet access they can have a friend or a family member check for them, and from anywhere. We take advantage of every opportunity to promote this capability in the media; we even have free magnetic dog bones promoting the web site.

NKAC: The effort has certainly been very successful and speaks volumes about the importance of being proactive about redeeming strays. What are your other top tips to help other shelters do as good a job in this area as your shelter does:

Mitch's Other Top Tips:

1. *Cross Your T's & Dot Your I's:* "Our administrative staff works hard to get complete information of lost and found animals and they upload this information to Petharbor.com as well as entering it in our Lost and Found Animal Reports book that citizens can check when visiting our facility."
2. *Know When to Hold 'Em:* "If we believe we know who the owner is, we will hold the animal beyond the minimum 5-day holding period."
3. *Knock, Knock:* "We will also send an officer out to the home and attempt to make contact with someone or post a Notice of Impound."
4. *Get By With a Little Help from Your Friends:* "If the reason for the impound is due to an arrest or hospitalization of the owner, we work with them to avoid their

loss of the animal."

5. *Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?:* "From time to time there are cases wherein the owner does not have the redemption fees at the time of redemption; these situations are evaluated by supervision, on a case-by-case basis. In general, we don't believe it is in anyone's best interest to refuse to give the animal back to the owner simply because they don't have the money to pay the redemption fee at that time, especially if the outcome is that the animal loses his life."

6. *Name, Rank, and Serial Number:* "When an animal is redeemed by its owner our administrative staff encourages the owner to have their animal microchipped, to reduce the likelihood that the animal would have to be impounded again in the future (accidents do happen, even in the best home)."*

7. *Give Them the Tools to Do the Job Right:* "Give field officers cell phones to communicate directly with the public who are calling about their lost pet; as well as computers in officer vehicles with access to databases which have owner/animal identification information; and use web-based services like Pet Harbor to post Lost/Found information as well as pictures of impounded animals to assist owners in looking for and retrieving animals."

Mitch's last word: "Encourage staff to 'think outside the box' to find measures to safely return animals to their owners."

It is outside the box thinking that makes Reno one of the safest communities for homeless pets in the U.S. We hope others follow too.

*: The No Kill Advocacy Center supports *voluntary* microchip efforts like the one in Washoe County. We oppose mandatory licensing and microchipping laws for reasons discussed in the article "The Dark Side of Mandatory Laws" which is available on our website at nokilladvocacycenter.org