

\$10,000 grant from CPOF awarded to Holyoke Veterinary Service to control pet population

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Spaying and neutering is vital to preventing pet overpopulation; each year thousands of animals are euthanized because there aren't enough homes and families to care for them. In an effort to control pet overpopulation, the Colorado Pet Overpopulation Fund (CPOF) was established to help animal care organizations with spay and neuter costs.

Holyoke Veterinary Service was recently awarded \$10,000 in grant funds from The Colorado Pet Overpopulation Fund. This is the fifth year local vets Dr. Darrell Tomky and Dr. Jeff Tharp have participated in the program.

Funds for CPOF are donated by taxpayers through the state tax return checkoff, and used to control pet overpopulation by subsidizing pet spay and neuter surgeries in underserved communities.

The Colorado Pet Overpopulation Fund has awarded \$225,000 in grant funds to 24 community coalitions of veterinarians and animal care and control organizations across the state.

"Thanks to taxpayer donations, we were able to distribute \$11,500 more than last year and that is another important step toward saving animals' lives," said Dr. Kate Anderson, CPOF board member and Pet Animal Care Facilities program administrator at the Colorado Department of Agriculture.

CPOF also helps create and implement education programs that encourage Coloradans to have their pets spayed and neutered.

Holyoke Veterinary Service first applied for and received a grant from CPOF in November, 2003. That year, HVS was awarded \$5,000, which was used to help pay for 138 pets to be spayed and neutered.

HVS did not participate in the program the following year, but each year since then, the Service has been awarded \$7,500. Thanks to the grant funding, a total of 810 pets have been spayed and neutered over the past five years, and this year's \$10,000 grant added to past awards makes \$37,500 total HVS has received from CPOF.

Though the grant is intended to help those pet owners with smaller incomes, Tharp said CPOF does not dictate how HVS distributes the funds. He added the first year he and Tomky received the grant, they required proof of income from customers, but have since stopped because the majority of their clients fit into the income bracket anyway.

However, to prevent people from taking advantage of the grant funds, the vets have developed their own policies on how the money is distributed.

First, grant funds are used to cover only half of the cost to get a pet spayed or neutered. Another \$10 discount is then contributed by HVS itself. The reasons HVS does not cover the full cost is similar to the reasons why most animal shelters charge adoption fees.

"We don't want people to think they can just have a free animal and not have to pay for anything to keep it," he said. "If there are no initial costs involved in getting animals, people are more apt to think of them as throw-aways."

"Also," he continued, "if someone cannot afford to pay the rest of the fees, they probably can't afford to keep the animal in the first place."

Secondly, there is a limit to the number of pets one family can bring in. In the past, the limit was two animals per family, but because of the extra money received this year, it is now three.

Pets that are brought in should be vaccinated first, recommends Tharp. "If the animal's not vaccinated when somebody brings it in to be spayed, we go ahead and do all the vaccinations, and the pet owner has to pay for it since the grant does not cover those costs."

Also, he added, if during a routine spay an internal problem is found, such as an interuterine

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infection that needs to be treated, the pet owner has to pay for the additional costs involved.

HVS typically receives CPOF's grant funds in November, and once the money is gone, the vets have to wait until the following November to get more. So pet owners coming in September for a spay can not expect grant funds will still be available.

Getting pets spayed and neutered is particularly necessary in this area, according to Tharp, because there is no animal control facility or shelter. With no place to house these animals, many of the strays that are found have to be euthanized within a short period of time.

"It is very hard for us to put down an animal that is perfectly healthy and good-natured," said Tharp. "If we could keep them all until we found good homes for them we would, but the costs would be outrageous."

Having a pet spayed or neutered ensures it will not breed with other animals in the neighborhood, which will hopefully reduce the number of strays in the area. Cats especially, said Tharp, are hugely overpopulated in Holyoke.

In addition, CPOF provided the following statewide information:

- More than \$1 million in grants have been awarded through the Pet Overpopulation Fund.
- Since its inception, CPOF has assisted in the spaying or neutering of over 32,000 dogs and cats in underserved areas of Colorado.
- In 2007, 163,700 dogs and cats entered Colorado shelters; nearly 45,000 of those animals were euthanized.

For more information on the Colorado Pet Overpopulation Fund, please visit www.SaveColoradoPets.org.