

Prince George's County Announces New Philosophy of Animal Care and Control

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It is a new day at the Prince George's County Animal Management Group. In July 2009, the County opened the new Animal Services Facility on Brown Station Road. The 37,000 square foot, state-of-the-art facility, one of the newest in the nation, boasts modern design with a 21st century ventilation system, sound dampening controls, natural lighting and bio-retention landscaping. It contains 250 kennel runs that greatly increases the ability to house homeless animals, an exotic animal room, a spay/neuter clinic, an isolation/quarantine area and a soothing reflection room that provides pet owners with a quiet place for bereavement. Prince George's County created a facility that is welcoming, friendly, sunny and pleasant to visit.

This project has been a personal priority of mine as well as that of County Executive Jack Johnson's administration. As advocates for the humane treatment of all animals, the County Executive and I are extremely proud of the design of the new shelter and the promise that this new facility will improve services for all County residents, both two-legged and four!

Now that we have one of the greatest animal care facilities in the nation, we are in a unique position to initiate the greatest animal care program in the nation.

Beginning today, the Animal Management Group will have a new philosophy and a new goal. Our new philosophy will be known as Animal Care and Control and our goal will be to find a loving home for each and every healthy companion animal while maintaining a high level of public safety. This Philosophy of Life does not come without huge challenges, sacrifices and the cooperation of many partners. But, it is the natural goal of a compassionate community and Prince George's County is indeed a compassionate community.

We will bring this Philosophy of Life to the County in a number of tangible ways by establishing priorities and aligning our actions to save more animals immediately. These policies and priorities include creating lifesaving solutions for the animals, directly involving the community in our work, delivering quality customer service, providing excellent care for the animals, and positioning the Animal Management Group as an open, community resource for our citizens and the animals.

We will establish a comprehensive adoption program. Adoptions are vital to the Animal Management Group's lifesaving mission. Our data indicates there are many pet owners and future pet owners in this County that we have not reached in the past. Other studies indicate that only 15% to 20% of new pets are acquired from a shelter. Our shelter has a greater variety of adoptable animals than anywhere else for miles around! There is someone for everyone at our shelter. Our goal is to make quality adoptions to more families than ever before in our County and beyond. This will be accomplished by developing sound, aggressive programs and streamlining the adoption process. We will increase public access hours in the evenings and on weekends for working families; hold adoption events in local neighborhoods and communities, thereby bringing the "animals to the people;" and offer special adoption incentives and better marketing of the shelter, it's programs and available pets.

An often overlooked area of potential gains is improving the likelihood that lost pets and their owners will be reunited. The shelter will be even more proactive than before in this effort. When an Animal Control Officer finds a stray animal in the field with some sort of identification, such as a license, rabies tag,

identification tag or microchip, they will do whatever they can to bring that animal back to its home, either by contacting the owner or the neighbor, instead of taking it to the Animal Services Facility. These actions will be followed up to ensure that the owner is doing everything he or she can to ensure their pet does not stray again, thereby increasing public safety as well. We will continue to ask the community to do their part by making sure their animals are licensed and have some sort of identification.

We will advocate for a change in the County statute that treats all animals fairly and equitably while promoting and maintaining public safety.

We will actively work to keep animals out of our shelter. After all, shelters are stressful places for animals and should be a place of last resort, not a readily available dumping ground. Many of the reasons people bring animals to the shelter or abandon them are highly resolvable. Most pet owners are, understandably, not animal behavior experts and they might not have the tools they need to fix a problem. But, many problems are fixable and most people are willing to try a few things to help keep their pet. Our staff is available to provide practical assistance, such as spay/neuter services, pet food, a bit of information or moral support. Call us before you give up your pet. Chances are we can help you or refer you to someone who can.

In order to meet our commitment to a lifesaving guarantee for all savable animals, we will need to keep animals happy, healthy and moving through the system. To do this, we will implement comprehensive vaccination, handling, cleaning, socialization and care policies before animals get sick and rehabilitative efforts for those who come in sick, injured, un-weaned or traumatized.

This is where our community partners come in. We will get the right people for the job by inviting community rescue groups and individuals alike. We will create a foster network in which puppies, kittens, mothers-to-be, elderly or otherwise challenged animals will be placed into the temporary care of a loving foster individual or family. The foster caregivers will work closely with the shelter and in accordance with agreed guidelines to help the animals become adoptable.

As we take steps to transform our new philosophy of Animal Care and Control into a model program, we will be inviting feedback from our partners and the community. We will use this feedback to improve our performance and speed our progress towards our goal. We will be publishing data that will help to chart our progress along the route.

My vision for the Animal Management Group is to be the premier animal shelter system in the nation and a leader in progressive programs and compassion. This goal, along with our philosophy of Animal Care and Control, can only be achieved with the support of the community and a dedicated staff. Together, we can create a new day for the animals and citizens of Prince George's County.