
Coastal Voices: Officials need to step up to help out dog pound, too

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Jon Alexander of “Angels and Desperados” fame recently noted that among all the negativity we see around us, there are two places that shine in Del Norte: the Northcoast Marine Mammal Center and the dog pound. These are special places because of the volunteers that work and financially support them. This inspired two letters asking for and explaining the need for more help at the dog pound as the number of volunteers has declined significantly. My wife and I were volunteers for two years until health issues stopped us about a year ago.

I’m sure people reading those letters thought these were the usual complaints of people wanting more assistance for their area of community service. Those letters failed to outline the magnitude of the contributions of volunteers to support their plea for more help.

The pound has a sign in-out log of volunteers’ participation. When we were there, the total hours donated by the volunteers was equal to one or two full time employee positions. Bear in mind there are only two full-time animal control officers for the whole county. At that time the volunteers probably spent as much (or more) time at the pound than the employees who had to go on calls and patrol. There were 10-12 volunteers at that time. We talked to one of the control officers recently and there are only three regulars at this time.

Another issue raised in one letter was that of donations, suggesting a dollar or two can lead to good things. That’s true but again fails to highlight the amount of donations to support the pound. I’m in no position to estimate the total donations but during our two years as volunteers, five individuals (including four volunteers) provided approximately \$20,000 in support. This was for big ticket items such as new kennels.

Others have contributed significant amounts, though I don’t know the numbers. Every volunteer contributed regularly with tennis balls, special food, treats, flea ointment or other items. One person even pays for the vet. You wouldn’t believe that dogs destroy \$400-\$500 worth of balls a year. I wouldn’t go so far as to say the county has taken advantage of the volunteers but has benefited enormously from their activities. It was good to hear they have funded a part-time animal care technician. This falls far short of the need.

When we were there, the county processed 350-400 dogs a year. Many were returned to their owners, some transferred to other facilities, 90-100 adopted and a few, like Barney and Boey, lingered for years, before finding the right human. The bottom line is everyone here benefits directly or indirectly from the pound.

Our elected and/or appointed officials need to take more responsibility for what is happening at that facility and stop using budgetary constraints as an excuse for not upgrading support. The volunteers won't always be able to provide what the county should be doing.

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