

Are you doing your part?

By Carol Gannaway

The plain fact is there are too many dogs (and cats) and not enough good permanent homes for them all. We have heard and read this many times. I'm very much an advocate of being a part of the solution rather than part of the problem. The pet over population problem is in fact a people problem. If there were a disease that killed millions of dogs and cats a year we would be horrified and spend time and money on research to find a solution. But in this country we annually kill millions of healthy puppies and dogs of all ages, purebreds and mixed breeds, all because there are not enough homes. (In this article I will state the facts as related to dogs. Cats experience the same dilemma but in greater numbers than dogs.)

There are a number of things we all can do to put an end to this outrage. First, spay or neuter your dog! Spaying and neutering is better for the health of your dog; ask your veterinarian about the benefits. There is no reason for your male dog to father a litter of pups. In fact a neutered male dog makes a far better companion since he will be more interested in you than the ladies. We should all be teaching our children is to spay and neuter pets until this senseless killing stops. What kind of lesson is it having your child watch the birth of puppies when only one will live to old age in a permanent life-time home? Never pass up a chance to educate people about the importance of spay/neuter.

Second, studies show that dogs that are properly trained and socialized are likely to stay in their homes whereas an untrained dog is at a much greater risk of being relinquished to an animal shelter. You may want to enroll in a group class where you will find support from your instructors and fellow students. The basic four all dogs should know are: sit when told, walk on the leash without pulling, pay attention to their owner (even when a lot is going on) and come when called. How does your dog measure up? Training and socializing a puppy or a dog takes a commitment of time and energy.

Owners often relinquish their dogs because of one or more behavior problems. These behaviors may have made it difficult for them to live with their dog. Excessive barking, jumping, destructive chewing, car chasing or lack of housebreaking can be too much for some owners to deal with and the only solution may seem to be find the dog a new home or turn him or her into a shelter. A dog is more likely to stay in a home where the owners recognize problem behaviors early on and ask a professional for help before the behaviors became a nuisance. Owners that have realistic expectations of the time and money needed to successfully own a dog are also more likely to persevere during the challenging parts of pet ownership.

Shelters are able to do their part by making sure each animal in their care leaves the shelter spayed or neutered. Most dogs however are relinquished to shelters because of behavior problems. If a shelter does nothing to improve a dog's behavior, when adopted the behaviors that brought the dog to the shelter in the first place will still be there and may have gotten worse. Each dog at a shelter should receive 15 minutes of training

everyday. Training in the shelter environment can make the difference between a successful placement in a permanent home and lack of training sets a dog up to fail in his or her new home.

Third, we know that dogs that received care from a veterinarian are also more likely to stay in their homes. Spay and neuter at the appropriate age and regular visits to your veterinarian for an annual health check-up and vaccinations shows a commitment on the part of the owner.

With knowledge of some of the reasons for our senseless killing of healthy dogs we are able to have a positive impact on that problem and the relinquishment of pets to shelters. All of us must speak out on behalf of our companion animals and be a part of the solution.