

M-SNAP wants a home for every pet

BY BRANDY BRUBAKER

The Dominion Post

Every year, thousands of pets are euthanized in Monongalia County simply because they can't find a home.

Mountaineer Spay Neuter Assistance Program is hoping to change that.

The group, started in 2007, has raised thousands of dollars and has partnered with several local veterinarians to get Monongalia County animals spayed or neutered since October, when members started handing out vouchers redeemable for spay or neuter surgeries. As of March, 266 animals had been spayed or neutered through the program.

Had M-SNAP not intervened, many of these animals would have gone on to have litters upon litters of more unwanted animals, many of which eventually may have been euthanized, group members said.

"Our goal is to drop the numbers of animals going into the pound and being euthanized," member Suzanne Gainer said. "What a loss."

Member Teddi Lester agreed. "Spaying one animal is so immense," she said.

According to M-SNAP figures, dogs can have two litters a year, beginning at just 7 months old. Dog litters vary depending on the dog's size. With some dogs having as few as two puppies per litter and some as many as 11, one dog can produce anywhere from four to 22 puppies a year.

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Cats can have up to three litters per year, beginning as young as 4 months old. The average cat litter is four to six kittens. In just one year, one cat can have anywhere from 12 to 18 kittens.

In 2007 alone, Monongalia County Canine Adoption Center received 2,851 animals and euthanized 1,947 of them because homes couldn't be found.

M-SNAP member Nancy Young said everyone wins when animals are spayed and neutered, especially the animals and the people who want to keep them but don't have the money for the surgery.

"If we can help them keep the animal and, at the same time, eliminate another litter that will end up on a back road, at a Dumpster or at the pound, what more could we ask for?" Young said. "It is a one-time cost that benefits everyone in the community."

Jennifer Schotchel, of Morgantown, qualified for two neuter vouchers from M-SNAP for two stray male cats she took in.

"They're our babies now," Schotchel said of Owen and Balthazar.

She said M-SNAP's voucher program enabled her to keep the strays, while ensuring they wouldn't add to the pet overpopu-



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Carly Protzman, a veterinary technician at Paw Prints, holds Juno, a Jack Russell Terrier spayed with a voucher from M-SNAP.

lation problem.

"You can tell they really want to help animals," Schotchel said. "There are so many people who

want to help [stray] animals but they aren't financially able to. [M-SNAP] is a great resource for people who have a big heart but

not a big wallet."

Lester said they are happy to help.

"We're very, very proud," she said. "It's such a sense of accomplishment to know we have a 90 percent redemption rate on our vouchers so far."

Young agreed.

"Even though thousands of dollars are spent each year by local animal-welfare groups and the county government trying to manage pet overpopulation, there still are more dogs and cats entering the pound than there are people willing to care for them," Young said. "Any pet owner who wants to do the right thing, but who honestly cannot afford the surgery, can receive our assistance. Our motto is, if a pet owner who resides in this county asks for our help, and we have the funds, we will help them."

Gainer stressed that just 10 percent of donations to M-SNAP go to administrative costs — things like telephone bills, postage stamps and copying fees. The rest goes to spaying and neutering animals.

The all-volunteer organization has partnered with eight area veterinary clinics to accept the spay and neuter vouchers. They are Animal Medical Center, Brookvalley Veterinary Clinic, Cheat Lake Animal Hospital, Hillcrest Veterinary Clinic, Dr. Charles Hyde, Middletown Animal Clinic, Morgantown Veterinary Care and Paw Prints Veterinary Clinic.