

Animal
shelters

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He feeds 'em, cleans 'em and chases 'em

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WATSONVILLE — Whether it's politics or animal pounds, Watsonville distinguishes itself by taking an independent and moderate approach to issues.

Watsonville is the only city in the county that runs its own animal pound — as it always has. While that creates some problems, it also has its benefits, according to Poundmaster Mark Bean, who's held the position for six years.

As the only full-time employee, Bean's job is to "feed 'em, clean 'em and chase 'em."

Because he is the only one employed at the pound, he runs into the complaint that he's not there enough of the time for people to retrieve their animals. His hours at the pound are 8 to 10 a.m., and 3 to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, but they're "always in a state of flux," said Bean. "I'm sometimes out in the field on an emergency when the sign says I should be back here."

In the past seven months, Bean has been without any part-time help, meaning the pound has been closed on weekends. While someone comes in on weekends to clean the dog runs, he doesn't open it up to the public. Previously a part-time employee would open it for four hours on Saturday and Sunday.

Bean would like the city to finance another full-time employee to keep the

pound open longer hours for the public, but it would probably add \$20,000 to the budget of \$44,000, and prospects of that happening are nil.

This year, as in the past few years, the Watsonville Police Department is recommending to the City Council that Watsonville's pound merge with the county-run SPCA.

But City Manager John Radin said it's always been rejected because of the convenience to local residents. If the pound were closed, people would have to drive to Seventh Avenue to retrieve their pets, as opposed to going to Watson Street here.

Bean is a moderate when it comes to animal rights, and as a former employee of the Santa Cruz SPCA, he takes a different approach to animal adoptions.

"There are a lot of left-wingers and right-wingers in the animal care business. The left-wingers we call humaniacs, because they'd rather kill an animal than give it to anybody other than the ultimate home," he said. "Well, my response to them is a good percentage of children don't have the ultimate in care.

"I just can't fathom it's better to kill an animal than find it a reasonable home," he said.

"There's room for mediation between the left-wing and right-wing to build a road of communication," he said, adding, "Where there's life, there's hope."

Bean said he sees a lot of county residents coming to the pound to adopt pets. They're people who've been rejected by the Santa Cruz SPCA, or who can't afford the fees set by that group. Watsonville's impound fees run \$10 a dog, and an additional \$4 a day charge boarding fee that's negotiable, he said. Dog licenses are \$10.

Animals are held a minimum of seven days at the pound, instead of the three days at the Santa Cruz SPCA. Bean said he thinks seven days creates problems in overcrowding, but three days is too short for the average home owner.

"This is a real minimal type of operation," admits Bean. "It's just for police action."

Doug Fakkema, director of the Santa Cruz SPCA, said his group has an interest in running Watsonville's pound and is preparing a report for the upcoming budget sessions.

He doesn't support a satellite shelter in Watsonville and says he'd prefer to close it outright if the two groups were to merge.

But realistically and politically, it may be impossible to accomplish a merger. "People in Watsonville don't always relate to Santa Cruz. We're perceived as not being part of the Watsonville community."

He adds if he were in charge of the shelter, he'd make some changes. "It's

designed for a lot smaller town than Watsonville has become."

In winter months, the Watsonville pound impounds 50 to 60 dogs a month, but that figure rises dramatically in spring and summer, said Bean.

While only city residents are supposed to use the pound, Bean often bends the rules to accommodate residents of Freedom, Salsipuedes and even Prunedale in North Monterey County.

"We're the only pound within an 18-mile radius. I tell them I'll take the stray dog they've got this time, but next time they have to go to the county shelter," he said. Realistically, he adds, if he turns away people at the gate, they're likely to release the stray dog a block away, which just creates more problems down the line.

He deals mainly with dog problems — strays and barking dogs — but cats are a "good percentile" of our business. "We get 100 cats a month in summer."

And occasionally he handles native or exotic animal complaints.

Even though he's a one-man operation, Bean tries to work with the diverse population here, educating them on animal care and responsibility. "When you have to rely on law enforcement alone, you're dealing with the rear end of the problem. When you're talking a population of 29,000 and a sphere of influence of 50,000, education becomes important," said Bean.