

County Takes Over Watsonville PD Animal Shelter

by Michael Thomas

When the County Animal Services Authority took over the Watsonville

Police Department's shelter on Airport Boulevard, they got more animals than they bargained for. The shelter was overcrowded, with at least 120 animals on hand. Several cats were loose in one of the public bathrooms and animals in kennels were stacked up in the lobby.

The County took over the shelter on Nov. 15.

According to Detective Kim Austin, who oversaw the shelter, the turnover came on a Monday after a weekend in which many new animals were dropped off. Tricia Geisreiter of the Santa Cruz County Animal Services Authority said the combined system is now working well, with the ASA providing shelter services for stray and lost pets for the entire County.

"The transition was a little bumpy at the beginning," Geisreiter said. But since then, the three full time employees of the Watsonville Shelter who were hired by the County have been

trained and are up to speed.

But 23 animals had to be euthanized during the first days that the County operated the shelter. Three of them were puppies sick with parvovirus. The other 20 were cats with illnesses.

"The majority of the cats we had to euthanize had upper respiratory infections, ringworm or they weren't social," Geisreiter said.

Strays Will Get Better Care

The Watsonville Animal Shelter was built in 1996. In the eight years since, the City of Watsonville has taken several approaches to dealing with animal control. For a brief period, the City contracted with the SPCA for services and during another time hired a private group.

But now both sides say that animals are getting better care.

"One nice thing is they have a veterinarian on staff," Austin said.

That means that the ASA can spay and neuter cats and dogs as soon as they come in, before they become available for adoption.

According to Geisreiter, "They were sending them out (after adoptions) with an agreement to spay or neuter the animal,

or sending the animal to the vet and the person adopting them would pick them up there."

The ASA is not charging the City of Watsonville for those surgical capacities, and in exchange, the City is providing them with the shelter facility for a dollar a year.

The City of Watsonville will initially pay \$318,000 a year for animal services, but that figure could change in future budgets. Watsonville will also benefit from the larger capacity of the County's animal shelter on Janus Way in Scotts Valley.

"We have quite a few more kennels and a lot more space," said Geisreiter. "When Watsonville gets crowded, we can transfer some of the adoptable animals up here."

New City Ordinance Means Mandatory Neutering

On Dec. 14, a month after the handover of the shelter, the City of Watsonville passed an ordinance requiring pet owner to spay or neuter their animals. Owners found with unaltered animals will be written a "fix-it ticket" that carries a \$30 fine if the animal is not fixed. □

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No Contest for Appointment of Sheriff Only Challenger Deemed Unqualified

by Michael Thomas

On Dec. 1, Chief Deputy Steve Robbins was appointed by the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors as Acting County Sheriff during the time needed for the Board to conduct a formal appointment process. Sheriff Mark Tracy had announced his mid-term departure after over a decade in elected office and 33 years with the Sheriff's department.

In the case of mid-term resignations or retirements, the Board of Supervisors has the opportunity to select a replacement for the remaining period of the elected term, or call for a special election if the Board can't decide.

On Nov. 30, the application period closed and David Et-

cetera was the only applicant who surfaced to compete with Robbins for the post. But Etcetera has been eliminated from consideration.

According to County Supervisor Ellen Pirie, "he did not meet the minimum requirements for Sheriff, which are set by state law."

Etcetera is not an employee of the Sheriff's department. No deputies from within the department wanted to challenge Robbins, who was Mark Tracy's choice to take over.

That means that Robbins is headed for confirmation as Sheriff in early 2005. Supervisors will take action to select the Sheriff at their meeting on Jan. 11, followed by a formal appointment on Feb. 1. While a County Supervisor could nominate his or her own applicant, such a move is not expected. □