

✓cf Animal Welfare RP P.1

# Pet-neutering proposal under fire

## Attempt to cut number of animals put to death

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**A**N ORDINANCE proposed by the Santa Cruz County SPCA that is intended to cut the numbers of animals put to death at the county animal shelter has come under fire from cat and dog clubs, veterinarians, and the county Farm Bureau.

The ordinance would require dog- and cat-owners to either neuter pets that are more than six months old or promise not to breed them, or get a breeder's permit from the SPCA. Also, the law would limit the number of kittens and puppies that pet owners and breeders could produce.

Now under consideration by the Scotts Valley City Council, the ordinance is slated to come before county supervisors early next year.

Critics of the proposed law, led by representatives of purebred dog and cat clubs, have formed a group called the Animal Issues Alliance of Santa Cruz County. Many dog and cat breeders see the the law as an ill-conceived intrusion that would force them to alter animals they want to keep intact, limit the number of animals they could breed, and let SPCA

officers snoop into their private affairs.

"We in the dog community feel a bit vulnerable. A lot vulnerable," said Karen Lindstrom, an alliance member and rescue worker for the NorCal Golden Retriever Club. "Someone could drive up and knock on your door and say 'Hi. About that extra dog you have...'"

But officials at the Santa Cruz SPCA, which euthanized about 3,500 cats and 750 dogs last year, say a law regulating breeding is the only way to cut down the number of animals being killed at the shelter.

Permit holders would be limited to one litter per year for each adult female, or a maximum of five offspring from multiple litters. Jodi Paterniti, executive director of the Santa Cruz SPCA, said distrust of regulation is a primary motivating factor behind opposition to the ordinance.

"I think breeders are concerned about regulations and being on lists and they fear that any regulations will lead to additional regulations," she said. "People see this as a restriction of their freedom and their

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**Karen Lindstrom, a rescue worker for the NorCal Golden Retriever Club with Thumper.**

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# SPCA proposal to reduce euthanasia under fire

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rights, and it's hard for people to jump up and say 'Yes, we welcome that.'

Under the law, two types of breeding permit would be available. One, for "responsible" breeders who distinguish pet-quality animals from show-quality animals and alter those

than six months old who has not bought a permit or signed a promise to prevent breeding, and those who feed unaltered feral animals for more than 30 days, would be subject to fines starting at \$125 and increasing to \$300 and \$500 for second and subsequent violation, respectively.

Opponents of the ordinance

Animal control officers in the field have 900 to 1,000 pet-related contacts with people every month, and would have many opportunities to enforce the law every day, she said.

And officers, if they had the power of the law behind them, would be able to follow up on citizen's complaints, she said. For example, a woman called the SPCA recently to report that her neighbor's cats had had five litters of kittens, and the neighbor refused to get the animals fixed. Without the ordinance, the SPCA was powerless to stop the breeding, Paterniti said. With the ordinance, officers would be able to force violators to buy breeding permits or fix their pets, even relying on search warrants in extreme cases, she said.

Furthermore, simply having an ordinance would make law-abiding people fix their animals, Paterniti said. Others would comply with the law to avoid fines, she added.

Alliance members argue that the ordinance fails to address adequately the feral cat situation (domesticated cats and their offspring living in the wild), which they see as the biggest animal control problem in the county.

Paterniti said most of the cats killed at the shelter are not feral, but many are, and she admitted that the ordinance cannot solve the feral cat problem. The SPCA welcomes help from the alliance, she said, and would work with alliance members and volunteers in the pro-

gram the group has proposed.

Alliance members say they can greatly reduce the numbers of feral cats by raising money to pay for a neutering program they will start up and run, called Fix-a-Cat-Today (FACT). Money raised would pay for vouchers good for spaying or neutering cats, and volunteers could borrow traps from the SPCA to catch cats.

John Pisturino, a county Farm Bureau director, has lost 40 calves to roving packs of dogs over the last decade, and the SPCA has not been able to help him, he said. "They can't solve the feral dog problem, so how are they going to maintain this ordinance program?" he said.

But Paterniti believes the agency could enforce the law.

'People see this as a restriction of their freedom and their rights, and it's hard for people to jump up and say "Yes, we welcome that."'

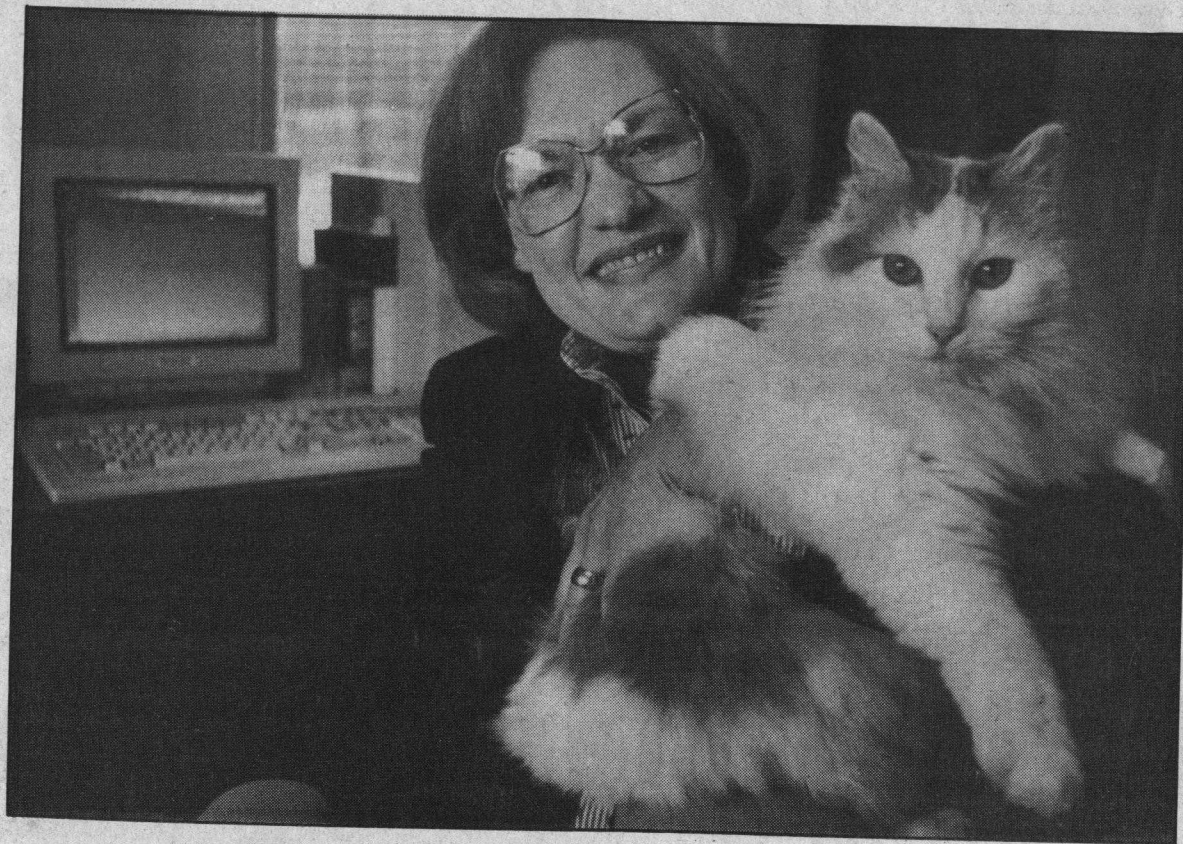
— Jodi Paterniti, SPCA

to be sold as pets, would be less costly (the SPCA suggests \$20). Those breeders would have to fix the pet animals by the age of six months.

Breeders say some animals, particularly large dogs, are not mature enough at six months to be evaluated for pet- or show-quality.

The other class of permit would cost substantially more (the SPCA suggests \$125), and is aimed at those people whose animals are likely to end up in the shelter.

As an alternative to buying a permit, those with unaltered pets could sign a promise to prevent their animals from breeding, but would be breaking the law if they broke their promise. Violators, including anyone owning unaltered pets more



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Jodi Paterniti, executive director of the Santa Cruz SPCA and Amber, the office cat

media support to start and maintain the cat-fixing program. Plans for the FACT program will be aborted if the ordinance passes, said Lynn Schmitt, alliance member and president of the San Andreas Kennel Club. Members of the alliance believe they would not get enough community support for the program if the ordinance were in place, she said.