

# Mobile clinic on its way to cutting cat population

By Lynn Fredrickson

Register Correspondent, For the New Haven Register, New Haven, CT

A mobile feline spay-neuter clinic, the first in the state, will hit the streets beginning Feb. 26 to help the cat population.

The 22-foot-long, \$63,555 surgical suite was paid for by the Vernon A. Tait All-Animal Adoption, Preservation and Rescue Fund, created through a \$500,000 bequest from Tait's estate. Tait, of New Haven, drowned in Lake Zoar in 1992 at age 71.

A \$10,000 contribution from an anonymous donor, also went toward the clinic.

For a \$25 fee per animal, cats will be spayed or neutered and given distemper and rabies vaccinations. The vehicle will travel the entire state.

"Overpopulation is the biggest killer

of cats in the state," said Dr. John Caltabiano, an Old Lyme veterinarian and president of Tait's Every Animal Matters.

"The reason we have this unit is so we can go the animals."

Caltabiano traveled to Humboldt, Iowa, earlier this month to pick up the vehicle, which is a prototype built to his specifications.

The vehicle is equipped with a propane heater, a generator, a 13,500 BTU air conditioner, a surgical light, a refrigerator, numerous cabinets and drawers and a sink and bathtub, both with hot and cold running water.

"That will come in handy especially for those cats that are covered with dirt and blood from fighting and things like

that," Caltabiano said.

The vehicle has 35 cages with room for expansion, Caltabiano said.

"It's a remarkable machine," he said. "I'm very impressed with it."

The mobile clinic is an important tool in limiting the cat population, particularly in view of the "significant" feral cat population in Connecticut, Caltabiano said. Many of those feral cats die of disease, hypothermia, starvation.

"If we can clean up a specific area, it will be taken care of for good," Caltabiano said. "But if we just have a place where people bring animals to us, we wouldn't be sure we got all the animals."

Officials hope some of the people who help round up feral cats for neutering will contribute to the cost of their treatment. Fund-raising efforts by the organization will also help defray some of the cost.

While driving the vehicle to Connecticut from the cornfields of Iowa, Caltabiano said, he got to thinking about the movie "Field of Dreams," in which Kevin Costner built a baseball field in the midst of his Iowa farm because he kept hearing voices say, "If you build it, they will come."

"If we bring it, they will come," said Caltabiano.





# NETWORK NEWS

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## S/N CLINIC ON WHEELS SERVES HOUSTON'S NEEDIEST

By Sean M. Hawkins - S.N.A.P. Project Coordinator, Houston, Texas

Every year in Houston, over 100,000 unwanted dogs and cats end up in area animal shelters. Over 90% of those animals are destroyed, resulting in twenty tons of animal carcasses being sent to landfills each week in our city. In the summer of 1992, to help combat this problem of dog and cat overpopulation, the Pet Over-Population Task Force for Houston/Harris County opened the first free spay/neuter clinic for animals in low income families. As you can imagine, the clinic was inundated with clients requesting service.

We immediately realized the need for additional facilities. We were also alerted to another problem - the inability for many low income citizens to bring animals to a permanent facility. Several solutions were investigated. First, we contacted Texas A & M College of Veterinary Medicine to inquire about the possibility of the school performing free spays and neuters on animals in indigent families if the animals were transported to the university. A & M was not able to commit to performing surgeries on a regular basis. Another option we explored involved purchasing a van to pick up animals in designated areas and transporting them to existing spay/neuter facilities. The logistics of coordinating several surgery schedules at various facilities, transporting 15 to 20 animals to and from surgery with all of the risk of loss and liability involved, and the lack of room on existing surgery schedules made this option unrealistic.

The resulting plan was to take free spaying and neutering services directly into targeted communities - a "spay and neuter clinic on wheels". We began to investigate traditional mobile veterinary clinics to perform the task ahead.

It was discovered that most mobile vans have only a few animal holding cages, miniaturized surgical facilities, and the inability to maintain a sterile barrier in the surgery area. We had to be able to



SNAP CLINIC ON WHEELS

perform 15 to 20 surgeries each day, which requires the capacity to house up to 20 animals comfortably both pre and post surgically. A completely enclosed surgical suite, with positive air ventilation, gas anesthesia, hot and cold running water, electricity, air conditioning and heating were all essential. We set out to design our own facility.

The Spay-Neuter Assistance Program or "SNAP" is the very first of its kind in the United States. Our customized state-of-the-art facility includes 22 stainless steel animal holding cages, prep table, enclosed sterile surgical suite, autoclave, and capacity to hold 100 gallons of fresh water and 110 gallons of waste water. The mobile unit is completely self contained which enables us to travel even to the most remote areas, such as camps, where homeless people and their animal companions reside.

Currently, the SNAP mobile clinic performs 10 to 20 surgeries daily, two to three days each week. When funding becomes available, we will be operating six days a week. We employ a staff veterinarian and an animal health technician to perform all surgical procedures. We also employ a humane educator who is responsible for going into our targeted communities and speaking directly with individuals about the benefits of spaying and neutering and informing them of our

scheduled dates and locations. We are very fortunate to have the complete support of the City of Houston Bureau of Animal Regulation and Care. The city currently provides funding for the veterinarian, free rabies vaccinations and a free city license for all animals who are spayed and neutered through the mobile clinic program.

SNAP works closely with the animal control department to determine sites for operation. The city carefully tracks all calls requesting service from the animal control department and is able to determine which neighborhoods have the most problems with strays and unwanted dogs and cats. We are hoping that by operating continuously in specific neighborhoods, we will be able to track a decrease in the number of calls into animal control requesting service. This correlation will also help us plan the targeting of future programs.

The mobile clinic cost approximately \$140,000 to acquire, build and equip. The clinic project has been completely funded by private individuals, foundations and corporations. When operating full-time, the clinic will cost approximately \$100,000 to operate each year.

Local animal welfare organizations have been sharp in their criticism of the

(continued on page 2)



## LEGISLATIVE NEWS

By Karen Ball,  
Project Zero  
Columbus, GA



On April 8, 1994, Governor Zell Miller of Georgia signed HB 1181 which requires the spaying and neutering of all dogs and cats adopted from public and private shelters. The new state law is modeled after local ordinances that have achieved higher rates of compliance with a spay/neuter requirement by making failure to comply a citable offense. The state law stipulates if the adopter does not have his/her pet sterilized within 30 days of its acquisition or the sexual maturity of the animal, he/she is guilty of a misdemeanor and is subject to a fine up to \$200. The law went into effect July 1, 1994.

HB 1181 was overwhelmingly passed by the Georgia legislature the first time it was introduced. The victory was attributed to a number of factors. First, the effort was spearheaded by a solid coalition of animal advocates, veterinarians and animal control officers. Ignited by extensive media coverage, the public voiced their support by writing and calling their legislators. Acquiring the backing of some of the state's most influential and powerful legislators also contributed to the speed and relative ease of the bill going through the General Assembly.

Although short-lived, the bill did encounter opposition. A coalition of dog clubs submitted an amended version of HB 1181 after the bill had already passed the House and was sent to the Senate for a vote. The amended bill proposed that the pet overpopulation problem was due to individuals who acquire the dogs and cats from shelters without taking steps to prevent them from reproducing, concluding breeders were not responsible for the problem. The coalition also claimed HB 1181 was

backed by animal rights groups whose intent was not to reduce the surplus pet population, but to tax and ban pet breeding and ownership out of existence!

While the strategy of the dog club coalition appeared to be to create controversy and thus stall and ultimately kill the bill in committee, it was apparent to legislators that the group had not done their homework, otherwise they would have known most of those testifying at committee hearings represented mainstream organizations who stressed the law would save tax dollars as well as benefit animals. Though the dog club coalition did not acknowledge the

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**“With the passage of the Georgia law, there are now 18 states that have spay/neuter requirements for their shelters.”**

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role breeders play in causing pet overpopulation, their version of the bill was accepted by the proponents of the original bill. It was not rejected because it contained the critical elements of the law originally intended. Time spent debating smaller issues could cause the bill to be held up in committee.

With the passage of the Georgia law, there are now 18 states that have spay/neuter requirements for their shelters. The fact that legislation is becoming so widely accepted provides ammunition for other states to get a similar law on their books.

Upon learning of Georgia's success, the Federation of Alabama Animal Welfare Agencies and the Alabama Animal Control Association initiated efforts to obtain a mandatory spay/neuter requirement for dogs and cats adopted from their public and private shelters.



### CLINIC ON WHEELS

(continued from page 1)

mobile clinic project. One has stated that we are duplicating efforts, and the cost of our project is too great. We feel as long as hundreds of thousands of homeless dogs and cats are destroyed by animal welfare organizations in our city, there is no possibility of too much effort being placed on spaying and neutering and the prevention of unwanted births. In addition, our start-up expenses were a one time expenditure, and they are far less than those of a permanent facility.

Another animal welfare organization has said that it costs too much money to operate the truck. In fact, whether or not our staff is performing spays and neuters in the mobile unit or in a permanent facility, the expenses for staff, supplies and equipment are about the same.

As a side note, it costs taxpayers about \$100 to send an animal control truck out to pick up a stray, transport the animal back to the shelter, provide food, water and care for the animal for three days, destroy the animal, and send the body to landfill. It costs us about \$30 to spay or neuter an animal through the mobile clinic which prevents more unwanted animals from ever being born.

The veterinary community has met our project with mixed emotions. Many vets were afraid that we would pull up in front of their private clinics and offer "\$10 spays" to offset our operating expenses. There were some fears that clients who patronized private veterinary practices would track down the mobile clinic in order to get a "good deal" on a spay or neuter. There were also concerns that a mobile clinic could not provide adequate facilities to handle surgeries and any medical emergencies that might arise. In response, the majority of our funding has been obtained with the stipulation that we provide direct services in low income neighborhoods. We could never legally operate in posh west

(continued on page 5)

# A historical note: To our knowledge this was the first mobile spay/neuter clinic...

A PROGRAM OF THE PET SAVERS FOUNDATION, INC.



## NETWORK NEWS

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### MOBILE VAN ON A MINI BUDGET

In our last newsletter we featured a luxury spay/neuter van that is currently covering Houston, Texas. To demonstrate the diversity of solutions, we are featuring Dr. Jeff Young of Planned Pethood Plus of Denver, Colorado in this issue. Dr. Young's van, fully equipped, cost under \$15,000.

The reason Dr. Young began using a mobile van was that it was less expensive than renting an office. He paid \$7,500 for a school bus that had been converted to an RV. He removed the bed and replaced it with carriers. The RV already had running water, heater and the capacity to be hooked up to 110 volt electricity with an extension cord. His major costs, doing much of the work himself and buying used equipment where possible were as follows:

Van.....	\$ 7,500
Anesthesia machine.....	1,000
Microscope (used).....	300
Centrifuge.....	200
Table.....	200
Autoclave: (or pressure cooker).....	300
Surgical instruments (8 packs).....	1,000
Light.....	50
Carriers.....	300
<i>plus required drugs, surgical gowns, gloves, etc.</i>	

While prices may vary in different parts of the country, his costs come to just under \$15,000; it could be double that in areas with higher costs of living.

In the West, mobile vets are accepted because there are many practicing large-animal vets. Denver



JEFF YOUNG AND HIS MOBILE VAN

has a whole page of mobile vets listed in the yellow pages of the phone book. It is true that in some states the veterinary associations have tried to limit low-cost and mobile spay/neuter clinics, but as Dr. Young points out, in those states where restraining legislation was enacted, the laws were challenged, and where challenged, they were beaten. Because it is legal to use mobile vets for large animals, it follows that the profession cannot set different standards for smaller animals.

The usual reason given for not allowing mobile vets to do s/n is that they "will not be around for follow-up care." However, they are reachable just as local vets are (by phone) to give a prescription or a referral. As is standard in fixed-site surgery, packs are sterilized, sterile drapes and disposable gloves are used and the field is cleaned and prepped.

Why does Dr. Young like the mobile van? First, it takes away the excuses. Simple procrastination is the reason for the existence of many an unwanted litter. It also removes the legitimate reasons why many people do not get to a clinic - lack of transportation. Second, a mobile van enables the vet to pinpoint a trouble area and go there, door to door if need be, as often as necessary. And last but not least, the mobile van enables Dr. Young to live his world view as a veterinarian. As a part of society he feels it is his responsibility as a professional to speak out about problems that affect animals - irresponsibility of pet owners and the overpopulation of cats and dogs. His mobile van gets him out into the community where he can do public education as well as s/n that is affordable to those he serves. Dr. Young's motto, "Think Globally, Act Locally" is his life in action.