

## WE ARE THEIR VOICE

We are the voice for the cats and dogs of Grecia and Costa Rica. With that, comes responsibility that has many, sides to it. We must set an excellent example to the public when it comes to pet care. The public will look at the way you care for animals and use that as an example for them. If your pets have no water, they will think ample fresh water is not important. If your dogs are on chains, they will not understand why chaining a dog is not a good idea. If your pets have fleas or ticks, they will not understand why it is important for many health reasons such as skin problems, tape worm, blood diseases and the pet's general comfort, that the pet be flea and tick free. They depend on people like us to have the knowledge to do things right and in a way that is best for the pets. Properly fed and happy animals that are free of parasites and health issues are our goal. Psychologically sound animals are achieved through proper socialization and training as well as genetics. Some of the needs we must meet in our communities are, caring for sick, unwanted and abandoned animals, controlling population of unwanted cats and dogs and of course the public health concerns that can be associated with our pets such as rabies, parasites, giardia and others. Sadly, we can continue to address each and every one of these through our welfare groups and **will never see progress without education and public awareness.**

I feel that our Adoption Fair has been very successful so far. It is also a perfect opportunity to talk with people about properly caring for their pets as well as the needs of that pet and our community concerning their safety and health, as well as teaching our pets and ourselves to be good neighbors. We all are aware of the neighbor that lets their dog bark all night or day without any concern for why the dog is barking and the affect it has on their neighbors not to mention the poor unhappy dog. This type of behavior does not in any way help the community accepts dogs as a part of a family and in fact drives a wedge between families and the idea of having a pet.

Our neighbor who enjoys feeding and watching the birds in their yard is not going to fondly welcome the neighbor's cats that come into their yard and stalks and kills the very birds that are being attracted!

These are only a couple of the examples that will be addressed through educating pet owners. In many cases people are not even aware that their pets are causing problems unless they are told....and there will always be those that just don't care...but mostly you will find that people simply do not have the knowledge, training and skill to deal with these problems. They think the problem is the pet and can be very surprised to learn that the pet must be shown what is acceptable behavior. So...the real problem the owner!

We must also disclose to the public the extreme problems with abandoned and surrendered pets due to overpopulation and the lack of sterilization surgeries. The public has NO IDEA the large number of pets that the welfare groups must rescue or are surrendered to them because they are unwanted. This is one reason it is imperative to keep an accurate count of ALL pets that are in your care or even dropped off at the adoption fair. When someone wants to surrender their pet it is also very important that you ask for a donation to cover medical and feed expenses. They may not have money to donate but in many cases they will happily offer

you something to help with these expenses...BUT YOU MUST ASK!!! People need to learn that there is an expense to owning a pet. There should also be an adoption fee. A pet that you give no value to will have NO value to its new owners. If they cannot afford a reasonable adoption fee they cannot afford a pet and will not spend the money to take the pet to the vet for needed medical care! You are just recycling and not solving any problem. In addition, we must be sure all pets are sterilized either before they are re-homed or after, by following up and making sure the new owner keeps this promise. This should be stated clearly in the signed adoption form.

I put together an INTAKE FORM as an example of a record showing the acceptance and history of each pet that is surrendered or rescued. I recommend that this form or one that is similar be used by everyone involved in rescue work. These numbers will be important in showing the public the full spectrum of your work and expense involved. It will also be essential when asking for donations and large grants from the many foundations that are benefitting animal welfare. We need accurate records to show why we need funding.

#### FIRST ACTION FOR PUBLIC AWARENESS

Each month I would like to post a large board at the adoption fair showing the number of animals that are rescued each month and the number that are re-homed with loving families. It will also show the total for the year. I guarantee that most people will be shocked at the numbers. This information is essential for public awareness of the problem. This will require a count from everyone involved in rescue activities each month. In the future the amount of money spent on each pet will be important information also. If we expect to receive support for our work we need to disclose to the community the whole picture concerning the expenses involved in animal welfare work.

I also believe we have enough volunteers now to have a place to fill out adoption forms and answer questions. I would like to see a more organized fair in the future with everyone having a specific job rather than one person doing everything. This way while a person is filling out an adoption form at the table another volunteer can be with the pets answering questions about the other animals. This is another good use for the INTAKE FORM because all the information on each animal will be readily available for any volunteer to share with prospective forever homes. All of our forms have been translated into English and Spanish so that everyone understands the questions.

So, in closing, there is a method to my madness! But more important is the final result of all our efforts. Your input is important and every idea can be improved upon by all of you. Some of what I propose is a little more work but I believe the end result is a more organized and efficient animal welfare program in Grecia!