New Ordinance Requires That All Pets Be Sterilized in ’92

By Kim Sturla, Former Executive Director, Peninsula Humane Society

Thirty-four yesterday. Forty today. Tomorrow it will be 45. Last year the total number was 9,112. Ten years ago, the total was 8,423.

Despite our low-cost spay/neuter clinic and our efforts in the educational and legislative arenas, Peninsula Humane Society (PHS, 12 Airport Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94401) is still destroying almost the same number of animals we did ten years ago.

Society-at-large allows the death of unwanted dogs and cats to be an acceptable solution to the overpopulation problem. We, therefore, decided to design an educational campaign that tells the public that
of dead animals filled two pages with the heading, "And we couldn't do it without you.‘ And we couldn't do it without you. You are looking at the tragic reality of what happens when people refuse to spay and neuter their animals." Page four explained the problem and told the reader what he or she could do to help solve it.

press packet. We designed a comprehensive press packet that included: magazine, newspaper insert, description of the overpopulation crisis, information on our low-cost spay/neuter clinic, history of what PHS has done to combat dog and cat overpopulation, our animal statistics from 1965 to 1990, a list of endorsements for our ordinance, and an announcement of our press conference.

Press Conference. Our press conference was held three days after our newspaper advertisement appeared. The purpose of the conference was to announce our proposed ordinance. The speakers included Supervisor Tom Nolan, author of the ordinance; Superior Court Judge Tom Smith, a prominent community member; PHS Shelter Manager Chris Powell; PHS State Humane Officer Ward Sterling; and myself. After giving our statements and fielding questions, we invited the media to observe and film our euthanasia.

Reporters observed, filmed, and photographed the "accepted" solution that for too long has been politely hidden from the public. All ran the footage on television.

The Ordinance. The original ordinance called for a moratorium on all breeding of dogs and cats until San Mateo County reached zero pet population growth. It was soon amended, however.

Passed December 18, 1990, the final ordinance reads that all dogs and cats over the age of nine months must be spayed or neutered unless their guardian has a breeding permit or their veterinarian states that the animal is not physically healthy enough to undergo the surgery. The criteria and fee for the breeding permit will be determined by an advisory committee, which has been established by the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors. The advisory committee is comprised of breeders, veterinarians, and humane society representatives.

1991—No Enforcement. There will be no enforcement during the first six months of the ordinance. During that time, the advisory committee will meet and determine the fee and other criteria for the breeding permit. The mandatory spay and neuter requirement will not take effect until January 1992.

1992—Fines for Violators. People who do not have their animals spayed or neutered and do not possess a breeding permit will be issued a citation. The penalty is an infraction; the maximum fine for the first offense is $100. All first-time violators, however, will receive a "fix-it" ticket. In other words, if someone’s dog or cat has bred or is not spayed or neutered, and the guardian does not have a breeding permit, he or she will be issued a citation. The citation fee, however, will be waived if the animal is sterilized within 30 to 90 days (30 days for males and females who are not pregnant, and 90 days for pregnant females).

This gradual "phase-in" is vital to the success of the ordinance. It is critical that PHS has sufficient time to conduct a massive educational outreach campaign to inform the residents of San Mateo County about this new ordinance and assist them in making arrangements to get their animals altered at an affordable price.

Enforcement. Because PHS is the animal control agency for the entire county, it will be responsible for enforcing the ordinance. When people come in to claim their lost animals, they will have to either show proof that their animals are altered or present their breeding permits. PHS will also request cooperation from local newspapers so that when people advertise homes for their litters of kittens and puppies, they will be required to display their breeding permit number.

Additionally, the public will be our eyes and ears. The vast majority of the citations issued for violations of the local animal control laws are initiated by complaints from the public. The dog license list also tells us which guardians have their dogs spayed or neutered. We will, of course, begin with this group.

One last point should be made with respect to enforcement: Another positive aspect of the ordinance is that the importance of establishing a cat licensing program has finally gained acceptance. Once this program is in place, we will be able to monitor the feline population more accurately.

The Public’s Reaction. The support our campaign received and continues to receive is tremendous. Our newspaper advertisement generated some angry phone calls, but we had many more people—those who...
Regulating the breeding of pets is not an extreme solution to overpopulation. Killing them is.

understood the message we sent—who expressed gratitude for our courage.

After the euthanasia footage ran on local and national television, we were inundated with letters and phone calls. Again, the supportive phone calls and letters far outnumbered those from people offended by the dramatic visuals.

It was reassuring that many of those who originally contacted us to voice their opposition to the newspaper advertisement and euthanasia demonstrations quickly came around and ended up supporting our ordinance.

The ordinance was less controversial. We certainly heard loud opposition from the dog breeders, the American Kennel Club, and some veterinarians. But the reaction and action from our membership and the general public was very supportive.

We hope our efforts will be the first of many and that similar pieces of legislation will surface all over the country. Regulating the breeding of cats and dogs is not an extreme solution to overpopulation. Killing them is.

To obtain a copy of the San Mateo ordinance, as well as a copy of a ten-point strategy to get such an ordinance passed, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your request to Pet Overpopulation Action Network, Peninsula Humane Society, 12 Airport Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94401.

Mandatory Sterilization: Why It’s Essential

That Every Adopted Animal Be Sterilized

I’m not a mathematician, but if you are satisfied that 90 out of 100 adopted animals are being sterilized, then you are saying that you are pleased with yourself that 10 of those animals are not sterilized.” That statement came from Diane Anchel, president emeritus of the New York State Humane Association (NYSHA), demonstrating why the answer to that question is an emphatic “yes”:

“Shelters strive for a high adoption rate,” writes Anchel, “in part because it sounds good in fund-raising, and partly because they sincerely wish to give as many animals as possible a good life. Unfortunately, almost every adopted animal who is not sterilized increases the number of strays.”

Anchel then presents NYSHA’s concept of the “effective adoption rate,” designed to provide a theoretical measure of the number of surplus animals who result from an adoption policy that fails to ensure 100 percent sterilization of adopted pets.

“Effective adoptions” are defined as the number of adoptions, minus the number of unsterilized animals, minus the number of their potential offspring within the next two years. The resulting figure is the number of potentially unwanted animals who could be produced within two years from all unsterilized, adopted animals.

Anchel provides a theoretical example for calculating the effective adoption rate: “If a shelter adopts out 20 out of 100 animals, the ‘adoption rate’ is 20 percent. If 90 percent (18) of these are sterilized, there will be two unsterilized animals released. These may have two litters of, say, 8 pups each during the year (32 pups).

“It is highly unlikely that those who do not sterilize their own animals will ensure the sterilization of the progeny of these animals. If 16 of these 32 pups each has a litter of 8 within the next year (128 pups), the ‘effective adoption rate’ is the original 20 dogs adopted out, minus the original 2 unneutered animals (which equals 18), minus the 32 pups (negative 14), minus their progeny of 128 pups (negative 142).” Thus, as a result of just 2 unsterilized animals out of 20 placed, there are 142 “excess” animals to be added to the already huge pet population.

“These figures do not even take into account the numbers of animals born in future years,” Anchel continues. “It can easily be seen that even when 90 percent of the adopted animals are sterilized, the shelter may well be responsible for adding to, rather than reducing, the stray population.”

For any shelter, measuring how many unsterilized, adopted cats and dogs actually do reproduce is an impossible task. Anchel acknowledges that not all unsterilized, adopted animals will reproduce, and that some will be returned to the shelter, die, or be euthanized before reproducing. However, the breeding potential of an unsterilized, adopted animal who will “probably” avoid getting their animal sterilized; adopters should be people who will be likely to honor the contract. Adoption counselors should also educate the new owner about the rights of the spay, neuter, or die contract that they signed.

How It Can Be Done

In 1990, Marin Humane Society (MHS, 171 Bel Marin Keys Blvd., Novato, CA 94949) first achieved 100 percent sterilization of pets adopted from the shelter.

So said Executive Director Diane Allevato at the 1990 HSUS Preconference Symposium held October 24, 1990, in San Francisco, where she presented her society’s methods for achieving that goal. Shelters, Allevato emphasized, must “guarantee that every single one of the animals adopted from the shelter is sterilized. Every one.”

Allevato first stressed the importance of working with a contract, which she termed “an enforceable promise.” The sterilization contract should be distinct from the adoption contract, should be drafted by legal counsel, and should look impressive. A shelter should also get some legislative support for its contract; Marin County, for example, makes violation of the contract a misdemeanor.

The shelter’s adoption program itself is also integral to making enforcement workable. The program should be able to screen out those adopters who wish to give as many animals as possible a good life. Unfortunately, almost every adopted animal who is not sterilized increases the number of strays.”

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Fust One Litter

By Kate Rindy and Rhonda Lucas Donald

Reprinted from the Fall 1990 HSUS News

Indy forgot that the apartment repairman was coming to fix her sliding glass door that day. She forgot to confine her seven-month-old kitten in the bedroom. When she got home from work, there was Kali, waiting for her outside under a pine tree. “Thank goodness you’re OK,” she sighed.

Every day, the newspapers are filled with “free pet” ads. Many of the people seeking to give away litters of puppies and kittens find success—they find “good” homes for each one of the litter. They think the book is closed once the last puppy or kitten leaves with his or her new owner, that the tragedy of pet overpopulation is solved. It isn’t.

The effective adoption rate is an excellent method of linking this breeding potential to any shelter’s “normal” adoption rate: “Unless the effective adoption rate is a positive figure,” Anchel writes, “there is no way of knowing the parents or grandparents of puppies and kittens supplied by the neighbor or picked up on the street may have been adopted as shelter animals who were not neutered.

One week or so later, the kitten is putting on weight. She is pregnant. What a disappointment, Cindy thinks. She was waiting for Kali to go through one heat cycle before she had her spayed.

For example, if Kali were allowed to breed at elevated status, the number of cats entering households owning cats. As a result of this mandate to ensure that none of the animals who leave their doors are allowed to contribute to the tragedy of pet overpopulation.

Overpopulation of Cats and Dogs: Causes, Effects, and Prevention is reviewed on page 14.

No matter how cute, every single puppy and kitten adds to pet overpopulation.

the overpopulation problem. Kali’s one litter is.

The kittens are a real success. All 4 find good homes. Cindy decides to get her cat spayed, but she’s in no hurry. After all, Kali never goes outside and has not had the striped female who went to the mother and two children is no longer kitten-cute. They say they don’t pay as much attention to her anymore. She is left outside and out of the way most of the time. When she delivers 5 kittens, the family puts a free-kitten ad in the paper. Luckily, a man is interested in all 5. He wants to use them as barn cats on his property. In reality, he sells the kittens to a local research facility. The family still doesn’t have the mother cat spayed.

“Almost every adopted animal who is not sterilized increases the number of strays.”

By Kate Rindy and Rhonda Lucas Donald

Reprinted from the Fall 1990 HSUS News

“Almost every adopted animal who is not sterilized increases the number of strays.”
Surely there is a demand for these purebred dogs. In reality, however, the average "backyard breeder" may sell only half of the litter and end up giving away the rest. If they have provided proper veterinary care to all of the animals, their profit margin is usually slim or nonexistent. There may be a dog or cat, even a purebred, for every home in America, but there is not a home for every available dog and cat.

One day, Susie is walking Bear in a park when they encounter a large male shepherd. Bear lunges, breaking his lead, and attacks the other dog. Susie tries to separate the dogs and is bitten by Bear. The police finally stop the fight. Each dog has cuts and bite wounds, but is otherwise OK.

Jack decides to have Bear neutered. He is astonished at how much better behaved Bear becomes and how much happier the dog is. Unfortunately, Bear managed to father 6 litters of puppies before his surgery.

The female dogs Bear impregnated had 34 puppies after litter. Pet overpopulation is not a new issue to most people. Since the 1960s, groups such as The HSUS have worked to inform people of the problem of too many pets and not enough homes and to encourage education, sterilization, and legislation to protect animals.

But "pet overpopulation" may seem abstract to the average person who just has one litter on his hands. One, 2, or 4 animals does not seem like an insurmountable problem. But with a population already saturated with pets and 10 or 20 people bringing litters into each animal shelter daily, the picture becomes clearer.

Pet overpopulation comes from many sources. It comes from people who breed animals intentionally for profit or hobby. While it is true that there will always be a market for purebred animals, that market should be filled by conscientious breeders who are committed to improving their animals' breed in terms of genetics, behavior, and temperament, as well as proper color, size, and shape.

Pet overpopulation comes from puppy mills, those cruel, often horrendous breeding farms that supply pet-store animals. Pet overpopulation comes from animal shelters that do not ensure that the pets they adopt out are spayed or neutered. These shelters are revolving doors for pets and their offspring.

Pet overpopulation, or at least attitudes that perpetuate the problem, even comes from commercial ads and catalogs for pet food. Happy children romp with puppies and kittens, all in an effort to push cat and dog food. These companies are very concerned about keeping pets healthy through good nutrition, but also do their part to foster pet overpopulation and assure more sales.

But primarily, pet overpopulation comes from pet owners who allow their unaltered pets outside, where they do breed. It comes from people who allow their pets to have "just one litter," for whatever reason, or from pet owners who realize that "Sam" is really "Samantha" after she delivers kittens.

Many of these people would appear to be model pet owners. They provide veterinary care for their animals, give them special toys, fancy collars, and gourmet pet food. They spend a lot of money on their pets—sales of pet products are expected to exceed 8 billion dollars this year. But when they allow their animals to breed, even if it is an "accident," they are irresponsible and at the root of the pet overpopulation problem.

There are so many sources of pet overpopulation. But there are also many solutions. For over 20 years, The HSUS has worked to expose the cruelties of pet overpopulation and the ways to prevent this unnecessary suffering. In the last three years, our "Be a P.A.L.—Prevent A Litter" Campaign has been implemented by thousands of individuals and groups across the country.

Now, more than ever before, veterinarians in increasing numbers are educating their clients about the importance and advantages of having their pets spayed or neutered. Cooperative programs by veterinarians, humane groups, and individuals offer reduced-fee surgeries for animals whose owners can’t afford the regular price. Legislation that protects animals by requiring responsible pet ownership is in place in many parts of the country. Mandatory sterilization of shelter animals, differential licensing, and ordinances regulating the breeding of animals all contribute to responsible pet ownership.

Most importantly, the solutions lie in the hands of individual pet owners. Pet overpopulation happens one litter, one animal at a time. It is not the millions of surplus animals born each year but one animal, one litter, turned in, given away, sold, abandoned, or no longer cared for. But the correlation between that one litter and pet overpopulation is rarely understood by the individuals turning in, giving away, selling, or abandoning their animals.

Our challenge is to reach people before they reach the point of giving up their pet, before they allow their pets to breed, and in many cases, before they make the decision to get a pet in the first place. Talk to your neighbor, your city councilpersons, your local media. One litter, one animal at a time, we can make a difference.

Reprints of this article are available for 30¢ each or at bulk rates of 50¢/$5.50, 100¢/$10.00, 500/ $300.00. Order from The HSUS, 2100 L St., NW, Washington, DC 20037.

Survey Provides Insight On Humane Society Salaries, Benefits

By Geoffrey L. Handy

Surveying a cross-section of the nation’s 501c3 animal welfare organizations, the Humane Society of the United States gathered a wealth of information about the financial security of the nation’s animal welfare groups. This information is now available to animal welfare organizations across the United States. Intended to help the society evaluate its own structure, salaries, and benefits, the survey sought to find out what other humane societies were doing in those areas.

According to Executive Director Nancy Bingham McKenney, the survey was designed to provide only fundamental information for evalu-
Although not statistically significant, the information provided by the 64 agencies that took the time to respond showed some interesting trends, especially in regard to employee salaries. The survey asked respondents to report salaries for virtually every shelter position. The survey also included reported salaries for virtually every other humane society position, from operations manager to veterinarian to front office staffer. Although not statistically significant, the information provided by the 64 agencies that took the time to respond showed some interesting trends, especially in regard to employee salaries. The average ACO or investigator salary, based on the responses of the 64 respondents, was $17,300. That same society's accountant/bookkeeper earned over twice that salary.

The survey asked respondents to report salaries for virtually every shelter position. The survey also included reported salaries for virtually every other humane society position, from operations manager to veterinarian to front office staffer. Though perhaps the most interesting aspect of the survey, employee salaries were just one of the kinds of information collected. The responding societies also reported how they handled employee benefits, computed vacation and sick leave, encouraged employee education, and provided for recognition of outstanding employees. Other information included each agency's degree of volunteer support and hours of operation.

The survey is perhaps most useful in showing a range of employee benefits packages provided by a variety of humane organizations. Just 5 of the 64 respondents, for example, said their agency failed to provide medical benefits for their employees, while 28 agencies actually extended those medical benefits to spouses and dependents. Twenty-six of the societies provided retirement plans for their employees, and 38 offered life insurance through their agencies.

The survey is limited in scope, but, as Buckingham McKenney suggests, it can be a valuable reference for managers of animal care and control agencies who wish to evaluate salaries, benefits, and other organizational elements of their own agencies. To obtain a copy of the survey results, which were prepared by staffers Ken Farmer and Anne Oneha, send a $10 check, payable to the Humane Society & SPCA of Seattle/King County, to the address above.
Here's what one of St. Tammany's special signs looks like attached to the state road sign.

eager to offer approval because the signs were to promote adoptions," Breaux says.

Next, she sought a signmaker to donate the actual signs. The first person she asked, Eddie Howarth of Graphic Design Services in Mandeville, Louisiana, agreed to create a total of eight signs—the equivalent of a $120 donation. The signs are a white plastic/paper blend, intended for outdoor use. They are expected to last several years if used only for 30-day periods each year. Breaux says, "It takes one or two volunteers just five minutes to push a bolt through the sign and attach it to the metal U-rails with a washer and wing nut.

The society is thinking of expanding the idea to other monthly themes—April as "Prevent A Litter" Month, for example. "The new signs really perk up the drab green state highway signs, and everybody loves them," Breaux says. "They project vitality, openness, currentness, and remind people to visit our shelter when searching for a new family companion.

"Even if we had to pay for them," she adds, "it would be worth it if one or two extra pets get adopted during those months."

Plan to Attend Conference in NJ

ow is the time to register for a significant animal protection conference to be held April 25, 26, and 27, 1991, at the Headquarters Plaza Hotel in Morristown, New Jersey. This regional conference, jointly sponsored by The HSUS Mid-Atlantic (MARO) and New England (NERO) Regional Offices, will carry the 1990 HSUS Conference theme, "Animals...It's Their World Too."

The conference will include presentations on a number of topics of interest to local humane society and animal control professionals. Seminars are scheduled for the conference on Friday, April 26, and Saturday, April 27, include:

- Large Animal Abuse
- Almost Always Controversial Cat Licensing
- New Techniques in Animal Birth Control
- Animals in the Environment
- "A Lay Person's Guide to Alternative Research Methods"
- Animal Collectors and Rescue Tactics
- How to Conduct a Workshop for Euthanasia Technicians
- Media Magic
- Building Bridges for Enforcing Animal Regulations
- "Wildlife Population Problems and Solutions"
- "Courtroom Procedure"
- "Cults and Animal Sacrifice: A Growing Menace"
- "Helpful Hints on How to Enact a Ban on the Leghold Trap in Your State"
- "The Roots of Cruelty"
- "Dealing with the Deaths of the Animals that We Work and Live With"
- "Problems with Human Animals"
- "An Update on the Oral Babies Vaccine"

One interesting highlight will take place on Thursday, April 25, when Guy Hodge leads conference attendees through the basics of oiled bird rehabilitation. The workshop, which will take place from 1:30 to 5:00 pm and include demonstrations with live birds, is limited to the first 50 registrants. The conference registration fee is $40, which includes an awards banquet on Saturday. To obtain a registration brochure or for further information, contact The HSUS Mid-Atlantic Regional Office at Bartley Square, 270 Route 206, Flanders, NJ 07836; (201) 927-5611. Conference registrations will be accepted as late as the day of the conference (space permitting), but conferences are encouraged to reserve rooms at the hotel as early as possible.

The conference room rate is $75 per night, single or double, and reservations must be made directly with Headquarters Plaza Hotel at Three Headquarters Plaza, Morristown, NJ 07960; (800) 225-1941 (in NJ) or (908) 225-1942 (outside NJ). The deadline to guarantee a room at the hotel is April 11.

If you write about or refer to the FIV virus, please use the term "feline immunodeficiency virus“ or "FIV."

Cassidy Begins New Endeavor

After six years of service, HSUS Director of Animal Sheltering and Control Barbara Cassidy has resigned from the Companion Animals Division to take on the challenge of directing a county animal control department.

"Through her extensive travel and hands-on work in local shelters, Barbara has improved the quality of care for thousands of animals," said Phyllis Wright, HSUS Vice President for Companion Animals. "The HSUS and local animal shelters alike will sorely miss her expertise.

Ms. Cassidy is now the Animal Control Program Administrator for Loudoun County, Virginia (Rt. 1, Box 985, Waterford, VA 22190; (703) 882-3211 or 777-0406).

In response to letters to the editor on the dangers to outdoor cats face, Bill Lemner of The Journal Newspapers (as/burban MD and VA) drew this very appropriate cartoon.

Correct Terminology Important

Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) is commonly referred to as feline AIDS. As reported in the December 1989/January 1990 issue of Shelter Sense, this disease in not the same as human AIDS and cannot be transmitted to people. But because FIV affects cats in much the same way AIDS affects people, veterinarians and others have informally called FIV feline AIDS. We advise groups and individuals dedicated to protecting animals to refer to this disease as FIV instead of feline AIDS. "Because of the fears attached to the term 'AIDS,'" says Stephen Krit- sick, DVM, HSUS staff veterinarian, "it is not in the best interest of cats or people to call the disease feline AIDS." The term evokes misplaced concern and could cause people to shun or abandon cats or otherwise cruelly treat them.

Company Sells Cruelty-Free Products

If you are concerned about the toxic effects of pesticidal flea-control products or wish to find pet shampoos that aren't tested on animals, Blue Ribbons Pet Care Products has just what you're looking for. Blue Ribbons sells pet-care products that are all natural, contain no animal by-products, and are not tested on animals. They offer dips, collars, and combos to safely control fleas, shampoos to bathe pets and soothe skin conditions, even bathing collars to keep soap out of pets' eyes during bathing. They also sell pet toys, healthy treats, and gifts for pet owners. Although prices in the Blue Ribbons catalog are for individual orders, discounts are available for quantity purchases.

For more information about Blue Ribbons and to obtain a free catalog, please contact Blue Ribbons, 2475 Bellmore Ave., Bellmore, NY 11710; (516) 785-0094.
Book Discusses Pet Overpopulation

A new compendium of information, views, and solutions to pet overpopulation should be added to the bookshelf of any animal shelter or humane society.

Overpopulation of Cats and Dogs: Causes, Effects, and Prevention is a printed record of the proceedings of a major conference on pet overpopulation sponsored by the New York State Humane Society (NYSHA, P.O. Box 284, New Paltz, NY 12561). Held in September 1987 in New York City, the two-day event featured many prominent speakers from the fields of animal sheltering and control, veterinary medicine, education, law, and animal rights.

Edited by Marjorie An- chel, Ph.D., president emeritus of NYSHA, the text includes thought-provoking speeches and discussions on subjects that run the gamut from early spay/neuter to pound seizure. A variety of enlightening perspectives and ideas on the plight of unwanted animals are presented, as are practical solutions that have worked before or may work in the future. Presentations include:

- How animal control is best handled in rural, urban, and metropolitan areas.
- A discussion on who is responsible for pet overpopulation.
- Euthanasia: the agents used, public perception, and the stress it places on technicians.
- What part veterinarians have played and could play in limiting pet overpopulation.
- An exploration of attitudes toward neutering and euthanasia.
- A discussion of the responsibilities of animal shelters in combating this tragedy.

Overpopulation of Cats and Dogs, with a foreword by HSUS Vice President for Companion Animals Phyllis Wright, includes speaker presentations as well as question and answer sessions.

One appendix features recent updates on some conference speeches, while another provides insightful editorial comments from Ancher.

This valuable educational reference should be within arm’s reach of any individual who faces the consequences of uncontrolled breeding of dogs and cats. The text can also enlighten legislators, educators, veterinarians, and members of the general public.

To order the hardbound, 260-page book, send $25 per copy to Fordham University Press, P.O. Box 6525, Ithaca, NY 14850. Add $2 for shipping.

Look at the costs if you don’t:

One litter of puppies or kittens will generally end up costing you more than the price of a spay or neuter surgery. The cost to feed the mother and puppies until they are old enough to find homes can exceed the cost of a spay surgery. Add veterinary expenses for the litter and the money you’ll be paying out increases even more.

The cost to run pet ads in the newspaper will add yet another expense.

What’s more, the cost of medical complications from not having your pet altered can be very high down the road. Unaltered pets roaming the neighborhood get into fights, are hit by cars, poisoned, and caught in traps, among other things. All of these “mishaps” lead to costly veterinary treatment.

And these are just the monetary costs. When it comes to animal lives, the cost of not altering your pet gets even higher.

Here aren’t enough homes for all the pets born. That’s why many animals end up on the street to die a cruel, untimely death and to continue the horrible cycle of more unwanted births. The rest of the pets go to shelters where each year, 7.5 million animals must be humanely destroyed.

See why you can’t afford not to?
New Ways to Solve Old Problems

By Phyllis Wright, HSUS Vice President, Companion Animals

Since 1970, The HSUS has promoted the LES program—Legislation, Education, and Sterilization—designed to combat pet overpopulation. Legislative initiatives and local animal ordinances mandating that all animals adopted from shelters be neutered were new ideas in the '70s.

Now in the 1990s, the Peninsula Humane Society (PHS, 12 Airport Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94401) has taken a giant step by getting an ordinance passed that makes pet owners responsible for getting their pets neutered unless they have a breeder’s permit from San Mateo County.

This is a new approach to an old problem and—with careful consideration and hard work—one that can be effective in other areas.

Begin by making sure that all pets adopted from your shelter are neutered. You should not be part of the problem by adding surplus puppies and kittens to the community. Allowing even one unaltered animal to leave your shelter can lead to generations of unwanted and homeless pets.

Do your homework and talk with community members about the pet overpopulation problem. Get a copy of San Mateo’s ordinance for your own reference (available from PHS). Read carefully this month’s cover article by Kim Sturla. And read the article from the New York State Humane Association on why it’s so important that every single adopted animal be sterilized, as well as the sidebar that describes how the Marin Humane Society is accomplishing that.

Once you’re familiar with what can be done, make plans and set goals you can obtain. And remember to be creative in working within your community. What works in one place may not work for you. Know the community and how to best succeed in enacting spay/neuter legislation in your area.

Once a law is passed, the key to its success lies in educating the public about the law and how to comply. PHS integrated a solid and ongoing education program in conjunction with the phasing-in of their ordinance, and any similar laws in other areas will need the same dedication.

Finally, of course, is sterilization. The San Mateo ordinance requires animals to be sterilized, but to make this easier for people, PHS expanded the services of their spay/neuter clinic and has found ways to offer affordable surgeries to pet owners. Your group doesn’t have to perform the surgeries, just arrange for them with cooperating veterinarians and clinics.

The LES program is still the best way to combat pet overpopulation. The Peninsula Humane Society deserves hearty congratulations for taking bold steps to implement these ideas.