

Rescue Ends Euthanasia in Dogs

Find out how one rescue put an end to euthanasia.

C.C. Sandorfi

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Any dent in the numbers helps. While many sources disagree on how many animals shelters kill each year in the United States, the figures fall between 4.85 million and 10 million dogs and cats. That represents a decrease from the mid-'80s, when the number peaked round 17.8 million, according to American Humane Association estimates.

Programs like Herro's are welcomed, said Merritt Clifton, editor of *Animal People*, a monthly newsletter for animal advocates. Currently, Las Vegas euthanizes 17.4 animals per 1,000 human residents. San Francisco and New York have also embarked on no-kill programs and euthanize just 5.8 animals per 1,000 humans, making them among the most successful.

"The significant thing about Las Vegas is that Mary believes that from a middle-of-the-scale position she can go to approximately the level of San Francisco or New York," Clifton said. "I suspect that's possible."

Herro's is the first municipal shelter in a large city (Las Vegas' population is about 425,000) to create a no-kill policy for adoptable animals, but a much smaller city had the nation's first no-kill municipal shelter. The Humane Society of Gallatin Valley, in tiny Bozeman, Mont., has had a no-kill policy for adoptable animals since 1995. That organization, which also holds a municipal contract and deals with all strays in Gallatin County (population 61,000), leads all cities with its low euthanasia rate 1.8 animals per 1,000 residents, Clifton said.

"We guarantee homes for all adoptable and treatable animals," Executive Director Ganay Johnson said. "The only ones euthanized are terminally ill or habitually aggressive."

That's exactly where Herro hopes to be, if her strategy works out. One big asset in her fight is the planned creation of a new, 35,000-square-foot building replacing the current 7,500-square-foot building, which will greatly increase the number of animals that can be housed. She's trying to raise \$4 million to build the new shelter.

It's been nine years since Herro rescued the dog on the free way, and she's spent eight years longer than she expected leading the Animal Foundation. Before she steps aside, she wants to create a final template for a shelter that won't euthanize adoptable animals, then hand it out free of charge to every interested city and shelter in the country. She expects to finish it in six months to a year.

"Everybody can do this and save the lives of their adoptable pets," she said. "We're hoping to share what we've done so far and want to create a working prototype. Then I'll feel I've done what I came in for, and then life lets you rest."