

Shelter cleans house, gains praise for improvements

By Catherine Carlock
The Virginian-Pilot

Cited by the state for problems two years ago, the city's animal shelter is now getting high marks from groups that help animals.

"The way animals are kept is profoundly different" from in 2007, said Debra Griggs, founder of Animal Rescue of Tidewater. "They're sheltered in a much more humane way... It's really a model for public shelters."

Daphna Nachminovitch, vice president for cruelty investigations for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, said in 2007 that photos from the shelter showed "inexcusable and illegal animal suffering."

But now, she said, the situation is much different.

"The animals are comfortable, the areas are clean. ... It no longer smells as it used to; animals are not languishing in their cages," Nachminovitch said. "It's really been a tremendous turnaround."

"For a municipal shelter, it's one of the ones that I feel like is kept cleaner and better organized than a number of other municipal shelters," said Jeff Roberts, CEO of the Norfolk Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Kennel supervisor Jake Roos, hired by the city in February 2008, was in large part the architect of the transformation of the troubled Norfolk Animal Management Center to the clean and dry Norfolk Animal Care Center.

"It just took a lot of simple elbow grease and hours, days, to get everything clean," Roos said.

Today, Roos and his staff follow the same cleaning procedure every day.

All dogs go to outdoor runs for breakfast in the morning while the staff scrubs the whole facility, then rinses

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Claudia Robinson plays with Lacey, a pit bull, as she cleans the kennels at the Norfolk Animal Care Center. The center has improved its conditions since it was cited for problems two years ago.

details

The shelter is at 5585 Sabre Road. It's open for animal visitation from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

To look at pictures of animals to adopt, visit norfolk.gov/nacc or www.friendsofnacc.com.



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A 4-year-old mixed breed dog looks out of the outdoors dog run at the Norfolk Animal Care Center. All dogs go to the outdoor runs in the mornings to eat breakfast while the staff scrubs the whole indoor facility.

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and bleaches it. Dogs get fresh water and are back in their runs before the shelter opens to the public at 11 a.m.

On the cat side of the building, 22-year-old staffer Rachel Iallni recently cradled a kitten while another strode by her ankles, tail high in the air.

"There's no other job like this," Iallni said as a rabbit hopped by.

Iallni said it takes about three

hours a day to clean all cat cages and give each cat fresh bedding, water and food. The "cat condos," which are almost a year old, have helped keep sickness down, Iallni said. "I think our staff just does a good job of keeping everything clean," she said.

As a municipal facility, the shelter is required to take in every animal that appears on its doorstep. Of the roughly 5,600 dogs and cats taken in during 2008, nearly 1,500 were adopted. That's up from the about 960 animals adopted in 2007.

More than 3,000 dogs and

cats were euthanized last year.

Roos said only around 20 percent of the overall pet population is adopted from shelters. The shelter works to find as many homes as it can, he said.

At maximum capacity, the shelter holds 150 animals - 80 dogs and 70 cats. And the shelter is more or less always full, Roos said.

The Norfolk SPCA, a private organization, operates a spay and neuter clinic adjacent to the

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shelter on Sabre Road.

The clinic opened in 2007, Roberts, the CEO, said. Though the space is leased separately from the shelter, the SPCA works in collaboration with the shelter to spay or neuter every shelter animal chosen for adoption. The fee to spay or neuter an animal is included in the adoption fees, Roberts said.

A little more than 200 animals were spayed or neutered in June 2008.

Griggs, of Animal Rescue, believes that hiring a shelter director would increase adoption and reduce euthanization.

"The folks who are there spend their time on the operation side," Griggs said, but "a director would spend his or her time on the developing or programming side."

The position of bureau manager has been vacant for almost three years.

Roos said in the future he'd like to see new dog runs, a healthy staffing level and even more facility improvements.

"It's clear that there's sort of a renewed level of interest in the success of this shelter," he said.

A group called the Friends of the Norfolk Animal Care Center has been helping raise awareness of the shelter and its animals.

Linda Davis, chairwoman of the organization and the city's parking administrator, said the group formed in December 2008. Davis said the Norfolk Pet Project, an ad campaign aimed at fostering adoption of animals, recently began with a billboard on Princess Anne Road featuring an adoptable dog.

Davis also said that seven of the board's 11 members are active volunteers at the shelter and have been for sever-



SOURCES: ESRI, TeleAtlas

al years.

On a recent day, Judy Yancey sat quietly in the front room of the shelter, waiting to pick up her new dog.

Yancey, manager of the pet department at Wal-Mart, said she prefers a mixed dog to a purebred.

"Most of the time, people forget these places," she said.

Outside, a 7-month-old pit bull mix named Nicholas alternated between bounding across the grass of the newly constructed dog park and hunkering down with a tennis ball between his paws.

The Happy Pup Dog Park opened June 20. The fenced-off area is shaded by trees on one side but is still visible from the road.

"It's just a huge morale booster for us," Roos said. He remembers the look of "bliss" on the first dog to use the park.

"It looked like the first time she had ever been outside," he said.

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