



2009 – 2010
Madera County Grand Jury
Final Report
Madera County Animal Shelter

Prepared By: County Committee

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Introduction:

The Madera County Animal Shelter (Shelter) had not been visited by the Madera County Grand Jury (Jury) since the new Shelter building, built by funds from the Roberta J. Wills Trust, was opened. The Jury thought it appropriate to investigate how this department was operating with the addition of the new facility. In the weeks following the Shelter visit, the Jury interviewed Shelter employees, the Shelter Director, Shelter Supervisor and additional county officials.

Findings:

At the time of the Jury visit to the Shelter, there were 17 Shelter employees, including one Director, one Supervisor, five Animal Service Officers II, one Animal Service Officer I, two Animal Services Officers I extra help, six Animal Service Assistants and one Clerical Assistant. Due to retirements, resignations and layoffs which were not replaced, there are 12 employees at the Shelter as of March, 2010.

The new building opened in November 2008 and houses the adoption area consisting of a reception area, a room with cages of adoptable kittens and puppies and a small enclosed area where adopters can become acquainted with potential pets. The remaining and largest area of the new building has a walkway down the middle with adoptable dogs housed in large pens on both sides. This large area also has some work and storage areas. There are no outside runs or outside access for dogs from this new building. The surface of the cement floor in the new building has imbedded particles designed to make the floor slip resistant, however, employees complained that this surface makes it impossible to properly clean the dog pen floors even when being hosed down.

Adoption hours are from 12 noon to 4 PM on weekdays and from 10 AM to 2 PM on Saturdays. There are no adoption hours on Sunday. The Shelter is closed on two Fridays each month due to furlough days. The older building includes office and storage space, a quarantine room for sick and injured animals, where euthanasia is also performed, and an area of dog pens with outside run access for newer arrival dogs. There are also outside drop off boxes where unwanted animals can be left after Shelter hours. Farm animals are kept in an outside fenced area. Laundry facilities, towel and blanket storage are in an outside area.

The responsibilities of Shelter employees include feeding animals, cleaning pens and cages, medicating and vaccinating animals, euthanizing animals, going out on calls to pick up strays, investigating animal cruelty, picking up dead animals, collecting fees and intake and adoption. Since the opening of the new Roberta J. Wills Adoption Building, and the work of the Friends of the Animal Shelter, the save rate (animal adoptions) has increased to 35%. The organization, Friends of the Animal Shelter (Friends), provides valuable services. Members foster animals in their homes, making them friendly and adoptable. The very young kittens and puppies are bottle fed until they are old enough to eat on their own. Friends own two trucks in which they take cats and dogs to and from the Shelter to PetSmart, Fresno, for adoption. Friends have a fund that helps pay for spay and neuter of animals. Other animal rescue groups; Border Collie Rescue, NORCAL Rescue, Gentle Giants, SPCA Santa Cruz, and Tony La Russa organization work with the Shelter in placement/adoption of animals.

There is a high absentee rate among Shelter employees resulting in numerous costly overtime pay. Although \$776 of the Wills Trust fund was spent on staff training equipment, there seems to be no safety training program in place. There appears to be poor morale among the employees, conflict between union and non-union members, insubordination, a lack of staff training and a lack of consistent employee evaluations. An incident of physical abuse (kicking) of one employee against another resulted in costly sick leave. There have been several incidents of theft from the Shelter by employees, including theft of \$4,000 by a Shelter employee, which was investigated, but no one was charged due to insufficient evidence.

Comcast owns a tower facility on the Animal Shelter grounds and is paying only \$350 a month in rent.

Conclusions:

There is a failure of leadership and supervision at the Shelter. There is a need for improved working relationships on all levels of staff to remedy the less than ideal work environment. There is a lack of formal, regularly scheduled training programs for staff.

The new Roberta J. Wills Adoption Center is a great improvement to the Shelter.

The Jury observed that the animals are well cared for and Shelter employees are dedicated to the care and well-being of the animals.

The Friends of the Animal Shelter is a most valuable asset to the Shelter.

The Jury finds the Comcast rental payment of \$350 per month to the County for their tower to be totally inadequate compensation to Madera taxpayers.

Recommendations:

- Modify the adoption hours to better accommodate the public by including some after 5:00 PM weekday and Sunday hours. Utilize volunteers if necessary.
- Resurface the cement floor in the kennel area of the new building to facilitate clean and sanitary conditions.
- Implement a regular schedule of ongoing, formal training to include employee safety, animal medication, euthanasia, and care.
- Shelter management should seek assistance from the Human Resource Department to improve the workplace environment and employee morale. Contract provisions with regard to employees, supervisors, directors and union representative interaction should be clarified.
- Overnight drop off boxes should be located so that the animals are protected from extreme cold and heat.
- For humane animal care, some outdoor grassy area must be provided for dogs in the new building.
- Monitor access and availability of Shelter funds to prevent theft.
- The County should re-evaluate the contract with Comcast for a fair rent for their tower on the Shelter grounds.

Respondents: Written response required pursuant to PC933(c)

Madera County Animal Shelter
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Respondents: Response Optional

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