



## Helping people help animals

BY MARYELLE HUNTER

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Photography By

DIANA MATTHEWS

A band of dedicated and passionate Sandhills residents is making strides in their attempt to solve the pet overpopulation problem in Moore County. A good example of their efforts was evident on a recent Tuesday morning when, through arrangements made by the county's Citizens Pet Responsibility Committee, a group of 40 puppies was picked up in Carthage by the North Shore Animal League (NSAL) for a trip north.

The Citizens Pet Responsibility Committee (PRC) made plans for Moore County's Animal Center to coordinate the pick-up by NSAL, or what is known as the world's largest no-kill animal rescue and adoption organization. This was the second time in the last several months when the Animal Center had hosted a NSAL "Puppy Transport" from Moore County, making the service available to Moore Humane Society, Animal Advocates, Scotland, Cumberland and Richmond counties as well as for puppies from its own shelter.

The PRC was formed in 2005 at the urging of Angela Zumwalt, (pictured top right) a Whispering Pines resident, when she approached the Moore County Board of Commissioners with an idea to centralize the work of several groups interested in animal control and welfare.

A former IBM executive, she had donated to several animal welfare groups in New Jersey, before she and her husband moved to the Sandhills. However, she

vowed that when she could, she would make use of her corporate skills to assist in the cause.

Established in 2006, the PRC, co-chaired by Zumwalt and Pamela Partis, embarked on a broad spectrum of activities during its first three years. Then in 2008, the PRC switched its primary focus to education in the schools of Moore County, with a goal of instilling in the next generation a plan to offset the pet overpopulation problem. The program, designed to be integrated with Moore County's Character Education initiative, stresses good judgment, integrity, kindness, perseverance, respect and responsibility for pet ownership.

Presented to over 1,200 fourth graders since it was piloted in the fall of 2008 at Vass-Lakeview Elementary School, the program is now taught by volunteers in all public schools as well as in several private and charter schools.

"We are trying to add some more of the private and charter schools each year," says Zumwalt.

Explaining that when the program was first started, they had only a few volunteers teaching multiple classes, Zumwalt says that their numbers have grown as word of mouth spread about the unique program.

"Nevertheless, we are always looking for additional volunteers, and the next teacher training session is scheduled for July 18."

For more information on the Citizens Pet Responsibility Committee, the Pet Placement Project, Animal Operations Advisory Board or to sign up for the teacher training session on July 18, contact Angela Zumwalt at 910 949-9953 or [angelazumwalt@earthlink.net](mailto:angelazumwalt@earthlink.net).

The work of the PRC has become a recognized best practice throughout the state. It was honored by a Governor's Award for Volunteer Service in 2012, and workshops and presentations have been made to statewide organizations by its members. The PRC has consulted with 23 North Carolina counties, with six counties introducing a similar program into their school systems.

Through a friendship with a college classmate who lives in Spain, Zumwalt reports that the program has even been exported. Now three schools in Madrid use the teaching tool.



Among other activities of the PRC, a Spouter (spay/neuter) Contest is run annually in each of the schools, giving all students the opportunity to become an advocate for their own pet or help another pet in the community. Students may write an essay entry describing how their pet

would benefit from being spayed or neutered and how this would help solve the larger problem of pet overpopulation. One winner is selected from each school and with the support of their families and at no cost, a pet owned by an award winner is altered at the Spay Neuter Veterinary Clinic of the Sandhills, made possible by funding from the Moore County Kennel Club.

The PRC also sponsors a regular Robbins Spouter Run, staffed by volunteers, who make a trip to and from the vet clinic in Vass, bringing pets for spay or neuter procedures for pet owners in the northern section of the county who would otherwise find transportation difficult, if not impossible.

In addition, the PRC administers the Tail Waggin' program in Moore County. Tail Waggin' Tutors is a volunteer group organized to bring qualified handlers and their therapy dogs to elementary schools where children and dogs can bond together over a shared story.



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Under the auspices of the PRC, a Pet Placement Project (P3) was inaugurated in March of 2012. Composed of a group of volunteers with the Moore County's Animal Center and led by Partis, their goal is increasing the adoption rate and lowering the euthanasia rate of adoptable pets in the Animal Center.

One of the unique ways in which they operate is the implementation of an Adoption Wish List. If an individual or family is looking for a pet but doesn't have the time to visit the center, all they have to do is to fill out a wish list form on the PRC's website, [www.mcprc.org](http://www.mcprc.org),

detailed their preferences as to type of pet, sex, size, age and color, and volunteers will find a match for the prospective owner.

As a further step to Moore County's efforts to bolster animal well-being, in January, a 12-member Animal Services Advisory Board was created by the county commissioners. The new advisory board oversees the operations of the county's Animal Operations Department, and its objectives are to "work with the staff of the MCAOD and community resources on creating and driving activities aimed at decreasing the number of animals entering The Animal Center, increasing the placement of animals from the Center,

ensuring the greatest level of care for animals at the center and reducing the euthanasia rate at the animal center."

The advisory board is also charged with acting as an advocacy group on all matters concerning the animal population of Moore County.

Zumwalt, who chairs the board, says, "It is really a team effort. For instance, we have people on the board individually skilled in all phases of animal welfare throughout the county, including veterinarians, a professionally-certified trainer and Animal Control and Sheriff's Department representatives."

She sums up with this thought, "Of course there are the local organizations such as Animal Advocates, the Humane Society and the Kennel Club who are very supportive, so it is a matter of combining all our energies working toward the same objective. I don't think that morally the citizens of Moore County want to live with an animal euthanasia rate as high as it's been in the past." ■



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