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## A better image may stimulate more help

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**STANTON** - Like the famous line from the movie "Field of Dreams," if the Montcalm County Board of Commissioners end it they will come.

Several animal rights supporters said people would take a more active role in volunteering and supporting the County Animal Shelter in Stanton if the commissioners end a controversial contract with R&R Research in Howard City allowing the business to take live animals from the shelter and sell them for research in exchange for disposing of carcasses from euthanized animals.

Susan Maguire of Edmore said she has seen conditions and statistics improve at other county animal shelters when they end deals with animal dealers.

"Adoption rates go up, rescue groups come in. It changes," she said. "There's something about it and I don't know what it is. Adoption rates go up and kill rates go down."

Greenville attorney G.R. Pete Frye said many potential volunteers are turned off by the R&R Research deal and euthanizing animals in a carbon dioxide barrel, a practice the county is actively working to change.

"You could go further in getting volunteer staff if you weren't trying to get volunteers to work in a place that is giving out animals to research," he said. "I think you could get volunteers to work at adoption as long as they weren't working at a pound like yours that is selling animals to a dealer or euthanizing them in a barrel."

"You can go much further in getting volunteers if your reputation at the shelter is better," Frye said.

Rhonda Waldorf of Sheridan said she appreciated the commissioners' efforts to begin performing euthanizations by injecting drugs instead of the carbon dioxide barrel. Rescue groups wanting to save more animals at the shelter feel limited by the R&R Research contract and other practices.

"We're fighting for the animals," Waldorf said. "There's a tremendous amount of support out there for the dogs in Montcalm County. We can move them. Can we handle them all? No."

Carol Darby, a volunteer at Mackenzie's Animal Sanctuary in Lake Odessa, said more dogs could be saved if shelter employees worked better with rescue groups.

District 6 Commissioner Ron Baker said the R&R Research deal and practices at the shelter would be a moot point if people properly cared for their pets and had them spayed or neutered to prevent overpopulation.

But Jeanne Urbanski of Coral, a member of Concerned Citizens Coalition Montcalm, said action from the commissioners is crucial to making that happen.

"There are irresponsible people in this county. We need to do something together to stop it," she said. "It can't just be people like me to stop it."

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