

Montcalm County Group Advocates Change at County Shelter

By Janet Vormittag

All they want are two things.

First, to stop the Montcalm County Animal Shelter from giving cats and dogs to a USDA Class B animal dealer who sells animals to research facilities.

Second, that unwanted cats and dogs be humanely euthanized by staff. Currently surplus pets are gassed in a barrel until the animals suffocate.

"It's a 55-gallon drum—much like you'd burn garbage in," said Sandy Carlton, who has been fighting for change at the shelter for 30 years.

Carlton and a group of about 20 like-minded county residents recently formed the Concerned Citizens Coalition – Montcalm County (CCC) to advocate changes at the county shelter.

"Our shelter has always resented any suggestion we should go to an injectable drug for euthanasia," Carlton said.

CCC is collecting signatures on a petition that requests the county commission to enact changes at the shelter.

At the July 14 Montcalm County Board of Commissioners meeting, people from CCC and Safe Haven Humane Society of Ionia County expressed concerns about the shelter.

These included the need for a written policy for animal rescue groups who want to pull cats and dogs from the shelter and find them homes.



Montcalm County Animal Control Director Patricia Lentz with a dog who is available for adoption.

resigned, was just replaced. Patricia Lentz, who started May 28, needs time to make changes.

He also said the contract with R&R Research (Class B dealer) will expire in February. "Now is not the logical time to discuss it."

Under the contract, personnel from R&R can take any animals they want in exchange for euthanizing unwanted animals and disposing of the bodies.

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Three years ago the Michigan Department of Agriculture, which oversees animal shelters, said CO2 barrels are not to be used for animals weighing over 30 pounds. But the Montcalm County shelter isn't licensed to use drugs to euthanize animals. So animals weighing more than 30 pounds are taken off-site by R&R to be euthanized.

Lentz said she is working on changes. She already has established a dispatch log where every phone call or complaint is logged. "Everything is trackable."

She has applied for a facility license so euthanasia by lethal injection can be performed at the shelter. She doesn't like using the CO2 barrel. "Basically the animal passes out and dies. It's not very pleasant. I want it changed."

Lentz hopes to have the license in place by February and will recommend that the Board of Commissioners not renew the 5-year contract with R&R. "I want to go with lethal injection, and I want it done here by my staff. I feel it's the humane way," she said.

Carlton said she's hopeful the changes will be made, but she's heard promises before. "We'll keep the pressure on."

She added that last time the contract with R&R was up for renewal she was told they objected too late. She finds it ironic that Carr now says they're objecting too early.

Class B animal dealers are licensed by the USDA and allowed to purchase and collect animals from random sources—such as shelters, auctions, flea markets, and private individuals—and sell them to laboratories, institutions, and other dealers for research, testing, and education.

Carlton said in 1995, 17 counties in Michigan gave animals to Class B dealers. Today only four continue to release unwanted pets to dealers: Montcalm, Osceola, Griot and Mecosta.

CCC President Susan Farrell, owner of Pawformance Grooming Salon in Greenville, said volunteers from Safe Haven Humane Society have been instrumental in rescuing dogs from the Montcalm shelter and finding them new homes. Rolling Rescue has also helped in transporting rescued dogs.

"We're trying to keep them out of the hands of the Class B dealer. But pulling animals is a band-aid."

As for cats, the shelter is a virtual death sentence.

"If you bring a cat to Montcalm County (shelter), there's no hope—it'll either die or go to research."

The adoption rate for the county shelter is dismal.

During a four-year period, 2004-2007, 4,109 dogs were admitted to the shelter. Of those, 550 were returned to their owners, 431 were adopted, 519 were given to research and 2,271 were gassed.

During those same four years, 3,926 cats were admitted. Of those, 6 were returned to their owners, 99 were adopted, 297 were given to research and 3,382 were gassed.

For more information visit www.cccmontcalm.org/ and www.michanimalnews.com.