

# They're abandoned

## Bad economy means bad news for felines and fidos

By Sharon Dargay  
staff writer

David Wartel vows he'll never rescue a stray dog.

The Southfield man isn't hard-hearted — just bitter.

Wartel combed neighborhood streets for the owner of a coddly found stray wandering outside his apartment earlier this month. Unable to locate a home for the dog, he turned to an animal shelter.

"They told me that as long as it wasn't sick, they'd keep it at least four days. I went to the shelter the next day to reclaim the dog and it wasn't there," Wartel recalled.

"It had been killed."

Shelter managers like Debbie Thurman at the Anti-Cruelty Association, Detroit, say Wartel, like most of the general public, misconceives animal euthanasia policies.

"We're the dumping ground for unwanted pets. People think we're terrible because we put the animals to sleep. But what do you do with 952 cats when you can't find homes for them?"

"They figure we'll find Fido a home. But most likely Fido isn't going to find a home. He's going to die."

Thurman says shelters are "scapegoats" for irresponsible pet owners, but acknowledges that they, in turn, are victims of a poor economy.

"When it comes down to feeding a child or pet, the child comes first. We've had a lot of fearful scenes this year. People are losing their homes and moving into apartments. They can't keep the animals any more."

BUT THE BIGGEST losers in animal control are thousands of homeless dogs and cats. Thurman says the number of animals funneled through Detroit-area shelters is in excess of 50,000 per year. There's no telling how many more animals are killed on the

streets or sold to research firms.

According to the Department of Agriculture, which regulates shelters, private organizations operate approximately 49 facilities statewide. Another 137 are publicly owned.

Duane Deming, enforcement director, said his department receives 20-30 complaints about animal pounds and shops every year. Most pertain to pet shops.

Complaints about shelters or pounds generally involve sanitation and record-keeping. When Deming's office receives a complaint — as it did from Wartel — it investigates and tries to settle the problem out of court. The department also inspects pet shops and shelters monthly.

"We've never had to go to that extent (court)," Deming noted. "Some places have trouble keeping records, but by and large they do a good job."

WARTEL CONTENDS that in his case, the Anti-Cruelty Association carelessly harbored stray dogs and cats in a single pen, causing a mix-up which led to the death of his dog.

Thurman insists that the dog was ill, making it a candidate for euthanasia under shelter policies.

State law requires shelters to detain stray animals for a minimum four days before killing them. Animals with identification tags must stay at least a week, and the shelter must attempt to contact the owner by telephone or registered letter.

Most city-run pounds kill the animals after complying with state regulations. Policies of privately run facilities vary.

County-run shelters in Southfield and Pontiac take in an average 20 animals daily. Although 80 percent of the dogs carry no identification, about one-third of them are claimed by owners. Approximately 1 percent are adopted. The rest die.

Carl Anderson, manager, keeps dogs

three to four days beyond the required limit. "If they look real good," a boy Scout troop helps with grooming, making the animals more adoptable at the Pontiac facility.

Southfield hired the county under a five-year contract to operate its shelter. In the past, annual operational costs averaged \$130,000. Jerry Tobin, public safety director, pegs that figure at \$100,000 this year.

"We've been in operation in Southfield for a year and a half," Anderson noted. "We run a humane and efficient shelter."

But directors of at least two animal welfare organizations disagree.

Edith Buck, director of the Birmingham Humane Society, and Lydia Stack, director of the Oakland Humane Soci-

ety, reject euthanasia as a humane animal control method.

"I'm not a fool. I know I can't save everybody. But I won't be the instrument of death," Stack said.

Her Detroit shelter, now at capacity with 240 dogs and more than 200 cats, accepts both strays and pets. She places 50-60 dogs and cats in homes every month. Only sick or unadoptable animals are referred elsewhere.

"This is like quicksand. If I place 20 dogs, I take in another 20 dogs just as fast."

The Birmingham Humane Society in Rochester cares for animals through a "foster home" network, rather than in a kennel. Volunteers temporarily adopt dogs and cats while permanent homes are sought.

Buck admits that she accepts and places fewer animals than most other organizations because potential owners are carefully screened. And the organization evaluates each animal to determine the most appropriate placement.

"FOR MANY HUMANE societies it's cheaper to kill a sick animal than put money into it," she explained. "It takes a lot of money and a lot of work. Other shelters deal in volume."

"But our philosophy is that these we take in, we help."

When no foster homes are available, Buck temporarily houses the animal in her own home or refers owners elsewhere. "With the realization that their dog probably will be destroyed (in other shelters)."

"Shelters in the destroying business

should be honest," Stack agreed. "They should tell people if a pet is unadoptable that it will be put to sleep. But, they usually say they'll try to find a home for it."

But Thurman insists that humane societies "don't lie" about an animal's chances for survival. Both she and Deming said the "no kill" philosophy of animal control is unrealistic.

"The problem of strays is getting worse because of the economy," Thurman added. "People don't want to put their dogs to sleep, so they turn them out. They figure they'll have a better chance of surviving on the streets."

She said tougher owner laws, licensing, and penalties — not euthanasia — is the key to curbing the stray pet population.

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**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE JOINT INFLAMMATION?**

In nearly all my columns I eventually make reference to "joint inflammation." In this column I will discuss what that phrase means.

"Joint inflammation" states, in a shorthand way, that on examination the patient's joints show the signs of heat, swelling, redness and impaired function.

The heat, swelling, and redness occur because of substances released in the process of inflammation. These substances cause blood vessels to dilate and become leaky so that fluids usually confined within blood vessels escape into the surrounding fluid. Other irritants produced by the inflammatory process cause an outpouring of joint fluid as much as ten times the usual amount. This excess fluid distends the joint capsule and increases the swelling in surrounding tissue.

Impaired function occurs because the swollen tissues hamper the tendons in their usual movements of stretching and rotation. Additionally nerve endings are irritated by the noxious products of inflammation. This pain, or threat of pain, causes the body unconsciously to resist movement of the affected joint.

In my next column I will discuss why inflammation has such harmful effects on the joint.

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