



CVM

Takes Animal-Care Expertise on the Road

By Bob Ratliff

Photos by Tom Thompson

An 8 a.m. class may seem early for some college students, but MSU College of Veterinary Medicine students who volunteer for the spay and neuter program often begin their day before sunrise.

That was the case for four students one crisp March morning. On that day, the school's mobile unit was making the 100-mile trip to Oxford to provide spay and neuter services for animals eligible for adoption at the Oxford Humane Shelter.

"The mobile unit, acquired in early 2007 by CVM as an emergency response vehicle with a grant from the American Kennel Club Companion Animal Recovery, is also equipped as a surgical suite," said Dr. Philip Bushby, professor of surgery and Marcia Lane Professor of Humane Ethics and Animal Welfare.

Contributions from the Humane Society of the United States, along with private donations, provide funding for operating the unit. HSUS played a major role in animal rescue efforts in south Mississippi following Hurricane Katrina. Because of that experience, the organization decided to invest significant resources to reduce the number of unwanted and homeless dogs and cats in the state.

The mobile unit is used to conduct spay and neuter programs in economically depressed areas of the state for pet owners who otherwise could not afford the service. The vehicle also travels to humane shelters around the state for spay and neuter days. The Oxford trip was the first shelter visit.

Focused on early-age spay and neuters, the shelter program is aimed at helping reduce overpopulation of unwanted dogs and cats, providing educational experiences for veterinary students and increasing the adoptability of pets at shelters, Bushby said.

"We see this as a win-win-win situation," he added. "It's a win for the animals because it gives them a better chance of finding a home. It's a win for the students because they gain valuable experience. It's a win for the shelters because they receive spay and neuter services, as well as other minor services, at no cost."





In the United States, up to 6 million dogs and cats are euthanized at shelters each year due to overpopulation and lack of homes. The service provided by the MSU program is part of the solution to the overpopulation problem, said Cyd Dunlap, president of the board of the Oxford Animal Shelter.

“When adopted, these animals will be ready to go home, already altered, and we won’t have to worry about them ever reproducing again...which is the very reason we are here,” she said.

Dr. Bob Guy, an Oxford veterinarian who has been actively involved in spay and neuter programs for several years, visited the shelter to see the mobile unit in action.

“This is great. This is just what is needed,” he said. The program, he added, is a key step in reducing the problem of too many unwanted puppies and kittens.

During the Oxford visit, the CVM students performed 15 surgeries under Bushby’s supervision.

The students who volunteer for work with the mobile unit become more aware of the role of the humane shelters while gaining valuable experience.

“The mobile unit allows us to practice advanced veterinary medicine and gives the shelter animals a high quality of care that most shelters cannot afford to provide,” said CVM junior Tai Curry of Hattiesburg.

Curry, along with seniors Ashley Martindale of Pampa, Texas, and Stephanie Gandy of Charlotte, N.C., and junior Hunter Corley of Okolona, participated in the unit’s initial shelter visit.

“The mobile unit teaches us to apply our clinical skills in a way that emphasizes efficiency and cost-effective care while maintaining a high quality of practice,” Martindale said. “It allows us to learn while we provide a service to our communities and the animals that are our responsibility as citizens.”

Students in the CVM primary care rotation and those enrolled in the shelter medicine elective have opportunities to participate in the program. Other veterinary medicine students may also volunteer for the program.

The mobile clinic currently hits the road one day a week to visit shelters, economically depressed areas of the state and south Mississippi locations still recovering from storm damage.

The goal, Bushby noted, is to increase the frequency of trips in support of local humane shelters and to increase awareness of veterinary services.

“The mobile clinic will help thousands of pets in the state live longer, healthier lives, while reducing the number of stray and unwanted animals,” he said. “It also will introduce a segment of the population to the services provided by their local veterinarians.”



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