

How it all Started

The Origins of No More Homeless Pets in Guilford County

A particular string of events came together several years ago that created the No More Homeless Pets in Guilford County program. After the Columbine massacre, a series of meetings were held by community leaders and volunteers to discuss why this American tragedy happened and what we could do in the Triad to prevent something similar from occurring. At the same time, it was brought to the attention of several members of Leadership Greensboro (lgso.org) that animal cruelty cases were increasing in both number and severity in the Triad. One common element identified by investigators in the Columbine shootings was that early animal abuse and cruelty was largely ignored and left unchecked.

A team of Leadership Greensboro members in addition to members of several regional and state community welfare, animal welfare and law enforcement organizations began researching the connections among animal cruelty, teenage delinquency and adult criminal behavior. The key question that everyone kept asking is "what can be done to turn this disturbing trend around before it is too late?" At the same time, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (spcatriad.org) and other groups of concerned animal lovers in Guilford County were trying to determine how to end the killing of healthy dogs and cats due to pet overpopulation.

Several successful programs – notably New Hampshire's STOP program and San Francisco's SPCA – have demonstrated that up to half of the annual cruelty problems could be solved by ending pet overpopulation. Animal Rescue and Foster Program (greensboro.com/arfp) member and SPCA of the Triad Board member Bobby Stearns had an inspiration in which she saw how a coordinated and concerted local effort backed by the support of a national network could result in ending the suffering and killing of healthy animals particularly at the Shelter, in the wild and at vet offices (where strays are often abandoned or pets given up). Bobby had been following with great interest the research of her husband, Leadership Greensboro member Dennis Stearns, and encouraged his idea of a task force to develop our own No More Homeless Pets program. Dennis went to national conferences, which were tackling these problems and issues and researching the best ways to solve them. His network soon encompassed Best Friends Animal Sanctuary (bestfriends.org) in Utah and Maddies Fund (the \$200 million foundation established to help end pet overpopulation, as well as Spay USA. (Esther Mechler, the Director of Spay USA, also helped with spay/neuter clinic questions.) Soon, Bobby and Dennis set about to enlist the help of Leadership Greensboro and the SPCA of the Triad, and "The Plan" was born!

The Plan

The Leadership Greensboro member-led team and the SPCA of the Triad generously got on board, launching the effort at the Starmount Country Club in the middle of a snow storm in October, 2000, with over 80 community and animal rescue group leaders in attendance. Leadership Greensboro's Joan Glynn, then Co-Chair of the NMHP initiative (and now President of NMHP, Inc.) has reinforced from the beginning that lasting success will only be achieved by having local groups "cooperate and collaborate." The

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research on successful programs strongly suggests that she is right: pulling together is vital to stop the killing and suffering.

The basic plan was (and is) basically trifold: to reduce the **supply** of homeless pets by an aggressive spay/neuter campaign (including a low-income program). Concurrently, we want to increase the **demand** for homeless pets by helping area adoption programs, creating a local monthly publication to showcase adoptable animals (which, of course, has become *Best Friends Companion*), and holding more Super Adoptathons (where large groups of citizens can meet with numerous animal groups and find their next best friend). Also, NMHP is sponsoring numerous **humane education** programs in cooperation with community and child welfare organizations.

Peter Marsh, the Executive Director of STOP (Solution To end the Overpopulation of Pets) in New Hampshire, sent his best wishes by videotape and officially declared NMHP in Guilford County to be the first sister program to STOP in the nation. New Hampshire's five year program was the first in the nation to result in no healthy dogs or cats being killed in shelters in 1999. Peter was also instrumental in helping get the North Carolina spay/neuter license tag law passed and has helped NMHP develop its low income programs.

Chris Warner, Director of PETS911 (1888pets911.org), also sent his congratulations to our kickoff and has supported NMHP in numerous ways from the very beginning. NMHP is promoting awareness of pets911 to help lost pets find their way home and to develop better community awareness of local resources as the NMHP movement grows. Chris won the equivalent of the Nobel Prize in 2001 for his work on earth911, his first project to help end wasteful duplication of local and regional environmental services around the nation. PETS911 awarded our NMHP program the "National Program of the Month" award in February, 2001, and continues to provide great assistance both locally and to the national NMHP movement.

Phase I of the NMHP plan in Guilford County included facilitating the opening of a high volume, assisted spay/neuter clinic (Triad Spay/Neuter Clinic) that would be owned and operated by the SPCA. Phase I also included helping several groups build awareness of the need to adopt homeless pets and partnering with various community groups to begin the process of turning animal abuse into being good neighbors to our furry companion friends. The SPCA and Dr. Sara Shug opened their clinic to the public in November, 2001, with a primary emphasis on helping those who normally couldn't afford to get their pet fixed and making sure that a number of veterinarians who want to see these problems solved would provide follow up care for these pets. In other parts of the country, vets have discovered that as fewer pets are euthanized and companion pets are valued more by the community, their own businesses prosper as well.

One of the highlights of Stage I was the combined launch of the Greensboro Symphony Year of the Pet program with NMHP's Super Adoptathon at the Carolina Theatre as part of the City of Greensboro's City Stage program in 2001. This Super Adoptathon was co-chaired by NMHP's Susan LeBeau and Joan Glynn. The lead sponsors were PETSMART

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and Novartis. NMHP's custom designed puppet show, *The Stray Prince* (for the Guilford County School System and area YMCAs), was also launched with three standing room only performances upstairs from the symphony performances. The Super Adoptathon hosted twelve different animal welfare and rescue groups, the largest ever in Guilford County and a great start to the adoptathon series. The Symphony's Year of the Pet

program will touch an estimated 60,000 school children in four counties with its pet themed performances, jointly developed by the extraordinary symphony staff (led by director Lisa Crawford and lead conductor Stuart Malina) and a team of NMHP and SPCA humane education specialists (with assistance from our national partners).

PETsMART Charities and The Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro have been great early financial supporters through grants along with many corporate and individual donors who want to see the pet overpopulation and animal cruelty problems end in Guilford County. One example of how professional groups are rallying around the NMHP mission is the Christmas-time party for the NMHP Home for the Holidays program that was hosted by the Brooks Pierce law firm and Best Friends Brigade member Ruth Ray. This fun event helped raise money and pet supplies for homeless pets and our neighborhood spay/neuter program.

Continuing Research and Partnership Development

NMHP's leadership has continued to work with the finest pet overpopulation and animal abuse experts in the country to develop more ideas for the future. NMHP's Dennis Stearns was part of the SPAY USA Southern Leadership team in New Orleans that developed the preliminary plans for sharing ideas among all southern states and creating statewide programs with the help of local, regional and national foundations who want to end pet overpopulation and animal cruelty. Dennis is also part of the Best Friends NMHP regional leadership meetings. Using the now extensive research database, he has helped over two dozen groups in 8 states as they develop NMHP programs of their own.

In 2001, NMHP in Guilford County attended a total of 4 national conferences and Dennis was asked to be a featured speaker at 2 of them. Our program has been featured in several national magazine articles and used as a model for partnerships between community leadership groups and animal rescue and welfare organizations.

2002 Initiatives

NMHP in Guilford County has the following programs in various stages of development for 2002:

Spay/Neuter

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- Neighborhood spay/neuter program, focused primarily on low income communities (including the new NMHP "The Big Fix" pet transportation vans)
- \$10 co-pay program for pet owners who are on local, state or federal government assistance to fix their pets
- Spay/Neuter awareness programs

Adoptions

- Two major Super adoptathons, including a June 8th Super Regional event at Ciener Woods Ford in Kernersville.
- Launch of the Best Friends Companion magazine to develop a monthly resource for the public to see adoptable pets available from area animal groups.
- Expansion of Internet links to local adoption organizations through the heavily visited nomorehomelesspets.org web site.

Humane Education

- Participation in community events such as the Children's Museum hosting of the History Channel Time Machine, The Volunteer Center's Human Race and All Pets Considered's Flyball & Rescue Fair.
- Puppet programs presented in schools and area YMCAs
- Humane education programs that reinforce the positive messages of the puppet shows.

- Essay contest for students
- Greensboro Symphony and other community partner programs

Want to help?

Working together, we can make a difference! Go to nomorehomelesspets.org and become a member, enter your donation or fill out a volunteer application online, or send your questions or areas of interest in which you would like to help to NMHP, P. O. Box 10196, Greensboro, NC 27404-0196.