

Cats & Dogs & Money

Help us put ourselves out of business! That's FOGAS' appeal to the community. When pet overpopulation is no longer a problem in our community, then we volunteers who are averaging well over 40 hours per week of service will be able to resume our real lives. It will finally be "mission accomplished" day for us. And we will celebrate that we are no longer needed!

FOGAS, Friends of Gonzales Animal Shelter, formed in late 2004 to try and save some of the homeless dogs and cats in our local shelter. That year the City took in over 900 homeless pets and "euthanized" (killed) about 800. The City was employing two full time animal control officers and spent roughly \$30,000 per year on shelter supplies. This did not include the trucks, traps, catchpoles, etc. that are control equipment rather than shelter supplies.

Over the next six years FOGAS spay/neutered, vaccinated and re-homed 3,924 dogs and cats. In addition we provided free spay/neuter for over 2000 pets owned by income qualifying residents. And this was all done with no cost to the pet owners, the City of Gonzales or Gonzales County.

Achieving "no-kill" status is the goal of shelters nationwide. It means that no healthy, adoptable cats and dogs are killed for space and that the term "euthanized" is only used for true mercy killings of the grievously ill or injured or those deemed vicious. It is a process and usually entails a 5-year plan. Websites of major cities and small towns often cite where they are on this process. Well, Gonzales achieved "no-kill" status for cats in late 2004 and for dogs in early 2008. We're there, where other cities want to be, and as a Community we should be proud!

So what's the current issue? Our shelter intake numbers are still extremely high. Shelter intake is expressed as the number of animals per 1000 residents you bring into the system. **Factoid: National average for shelter intake is 30 animals per 1000 residents and average cost is \$8 per capita for animal shelters.** In Gonzales we took 809 animals into our shelters in 2010. Using our City census of 7400, we are at a little over 109 animals per 1000 residents...over three times the national average. And we are paying \$7.46 per capita for the FOGAS shelter management contract of \$55,200 per year, plus whatever we allocate for utilities and space from the City. Animal control costs separate from the shelters themselves are not used in determining per capita shelter costs. While our per capita shelter costs are at the national average, clearly we could reduce them further by lowering our annual animal intake.

Next, a look at the Three Approaches to Solving Pet Overpopulation.