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## 'No kill' gains a foothold in pet shelters

The goal is fewer animals put to death. Spaying, neutering and adoption play roles. New York is in; Phila. is interested.

By Miriam Hill  
 Inquirer Staff Writer

**NEW YORK** - At the East Harlem animal shelter, barking dogs and the occasional quacking duck create a beastly babble that almost drowns out Ed Boks as he dreams aloud that one day most of the shelter's 400 cages will be empty.

His vision that New York will find homes for the 20,000-plus cats and dogs it otherwise would euthanize each year is part of a burgeoning national "no-kill" movement - one that Philadelphia also hopes to join.

"It's our society's dirty little secret," Boks, a former minister and fan of St. Francis of Assisi, called the large numbers of euthanized pets.

As executive director of New York's Animal Care and Control, the nonprofit organization that runs city shelters, Boks said New York gradually was proving that a no-kill approach worked, even in tough urban environments where people routinely abandon animals.

According to Animal People, an independent newspaper that covers animal welfare, in 2002, New York shelters killed 2.7 animals per 1,000, far below the national average of 17.4 per 1,000. The Philadelphia figure was 18.4 per 1,000.

Today, the Alliance for Philadelphia's Animals, a new public-private partnership between animal-welfare groups and the city, will hold a public meeting on the subject at City Hall.

Tara Derby-Perrin, president of the alliance, said putting a no-kill policy in place in the city's troubled shelters would require overturning a system that long has accepted euthanasia.

In 2003, Philadelphia Animal Care and Control Association (PACCA), the nonprofit organization that runs the shelters with city health department oversight, euthanized about two-thirds of the 44,550 animals in its custody.

"Historically, I think there's been this standard of, you keep the shelters clean and you kill 60 percent of your animals and you're doing a good job," Derby-Perrin said. "It's a lot of bodies, and these animals have asked for nothing more than just the chance to live."

After reports in the Philadelphia Daily News last year highlighted the shelters' unsanitary conditions and high kill rates, hearings were held that led to a number of improvements by PACCA. Derby-Perrin noted that "there have been changes," but added, "We still have a long way to go."

According to Nathan Winograd, an alliance consultant and a leader in the no-kill movement who will address

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today's meeting, Philadelphia once led the nation in humane treatment of animals.

In the 19th century, it was the first city to end public killing of dogs and cats, which routinely were drowned in iron crates. Philadelphians turned over the job to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which euthanized the animals privately. The city also created the country's first pet adoption program, Winograd said. "It was a truly revolutionary break with the way things were done," he said.

These days, revolutions take longer. Only a handful of places have switched to a no-kill policy since San Francisco led the way in 1994. New Hampshire has one of the nation's lowest kill rates; Tompkins County, N.Y., and Maricopa County, Ariz., where Boks once headed the shelter system, also have made strides.

Beyond the slow transition to no-kill is the fact that *no-kill* is itself a bit of a misnomer.

"No-kill does not mean no euthanasia," said Ed Sayres, head of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. He estimates that shelters in no-kill cities will save 80 percent of animals in their care; the rest will have to be euthanized. The goal is to reduce strays through spaying and neutering and to find homes for all but those with serious health or behavior problems.

Philadelphia is following New York's lead, modeling its alliance on New York's Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals, which was formed in 2002, also in response to criticism.

In January, New York won a \$15.5 million grant from the pet-rescue foundation Maddie's Fund to increase adoptions and underwrite spaying and neutering to low-income pet owners. Philadelphia also plans to apply for money from the fund, started by PeopleSoft Inc. founder Dave Duffield to promote no-kill programs.

New York has put several programs in place to cut both the number of animals in the system and the number that are killed. Operation Safety Net donates pet food to cash-strapped owners so they can keep their pets, and the city's Animal Care and Control has joined forces with the ASPCA and the Mayor's Alliance to offer low-cost spaying and neutering. (Other efforts are more fanciful, such as Boks' proposal to call pit bulls, abundant in city shelters, "New Yorkies" to boost their image.)

In the long run, Boks said, no-kill is cheaper than caring for and killing animals: A dollar spent on spaying, he says, saves \$20 in care and euthanasia.

Boks, 53, hopes to make New York a national role model. As a young man, he recalled, he worked for a vet, often cradling animals as they were euthanized with a needle to the heart.

"It got to the point where I would wake up in a cold sweat feeling a needle being inserted in my own heart," he said. "What we're trying to do here is create a more humane approach to animal care in every community."

## Talk About Shelters

The Alliance for Philadelphia's Animals and the Philadelphia Animal Care and Control Association will hold a public meeting on the future of the

city's animal shelters today

at 4:30 p.m. in Conversation Hall, Room 201, City Hall.

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