



Animal Rescue & Adoption Center of Eastern Oregon

December 27, 2016

From the President's Desk:

A lot of questions have been asked about the Animal Rescue, mostly in a pair of County Commissioner meetings held to discuss the contract between the County and BMHA. In this, the first installment of what I want to become a regular feature of BMHA's web site, I'd like to address as many of those questions as I can, in no particular order except how I wrote them down in my notes. In writing these notes, I'm hoping to squelch misconceptions, rumors, out-and-out false information, and help reassure the public regarding what the Rescue is doing and how BMHA is operating. Some questions people have asked are beyond my scope, as I am a relative newcomer to the Board, having been involved for only a little more than a year, but I'll do the best job I can.

And now, the questions:

- 1. Why are there 2 names?** Well, it's *always* had two names. Previously, it was BMHA as the parent organization governing the operation of the Louise B. McNeely Animal Shelter (2 names); now it's BMHA as the governing body of the Animal Rescue and Adoption Center of Eastern Oregon, or ARACEO. We put ARACEO first in the list because you would not believe how many times we are mistaken for the Blue Mountain Humane Society, which is in Wall Walla. BMHA probably wasn't the best choice for the name, but we cannot change that without reapplying for 501(c)3 status, so there it is.
- 2. Why aren't meetings open to the public?** The annual meeting is. We occasionally have executive meetings for BMHA business, which we have kept closed so that we can discuss finances, new ideas for fundraising, member issues, and so forth. Such meetings are not required to be open to the public. In future any meetings, such as the annual meeting, will be announced in a public location, such as the website, as they have been in the past. But understand, we will have an agenda, and that agenda will be followed; as the public rightly expects respect from us, so too do we expect that from the public, and there have been times in the past (and there continue to be now) when misinformation was rampant and the important work of ARACEO was not able to go forward.
- 3. How can the Board assure the public that it is doing business appropriately?** This contract is a large part of that, as there is significant oversight from the County as well as the continuing cooperation with the Sheriff's office and Animal Control. The website also lists Board members and, when we get them set up, email contact info. Financial information is available (despite claims to the contrary) on the site--- just click on the BMHA link and there's a financials page. These tax returns illustrate very clearly where

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the money has gone in the last 5 years. The fact that the Sheriff's office works with us is a good indicator that we're executing the work of ARACEO lawfully, and we have further validation from the organizations we are able to work with now ONLY because we are a high-save rescue. Moreover, documents like the one you're reading now will hopefully increase the transparency, but make no mistake---we're not hiding anything, and the new and improved web site is structured to help illustrate that.

4. Why don't you take in sick or injured animals? Actually, we often do, and have in the past, and have incurred an enormous cost in terms of veterinary bills, much of which was paid for by reserve funds and by donors (like myself, but that's not really relevant). We've taken in animals that required surgery but whose owners could not afford it; we've taken in animals that have been abused, such as being used as bait dogs; we've taken in animals used for medical research. And not just dogs. Our website attests to the fact that we've had all kinds of animals at the rescue, and despite rumors to the contrary, we do still take cats when we have space to do so. Which relates to a similar question:

5. Why don't you take in every animal? Because we cannot. We don't have the space. And because of changes in euthanization laws 5 years ago in Oregon, we cannot pay a veterinarian or trained specialist to euthanize all of those animals we then would need to kill. The Board made a difficult decision 5 years ago in the face of these legal changes to become high-save, and that necessitated changes in the day-to-day operation and collaboration of the Rescue, as well as a nearly total turnover in Board members. It is simple economics brought about by changes in the law. Perhaps people could lobby their state lawmakers to revisit that legal change?

6. Why do animals brought in by animal control get adopted or sent to other rescues before the owners can redeem them? Again, law and economics drive the issue. State law requires dogs brought in by Animal Control to be held for a precisely defined time: 3 days if without a collar, 5 days if with a collar. After that, they are moved to the adoption side. If an owner doesn't call the rescue inquiring about a particular animal, and the animal isn't chipped, or the owner isn't known, then the animal goes up for adoption after the indicated time. We make EVERY ATTEMPT to reunite animals with their humans, and have often gone out of our way to do so. But without SOME owner personal responsibility, it's an uphill battle. Chip your animals, write their name and a contact phone number on their collar. Help us help you, OK? We could hold animals longer, but then we once again run into space issues and cost issues, which would necessitate additional redemption fee for the additional days. We do what virtually every other animal rescue does.

7. Why are your fees so high? Well, they aren't when you compare our fees with other high save rescues, but we do have fees because we've received no funding from the County or any city in the county for the last 5 years, and donations have been markedly reduced for several years. We and every other rescue need funds coming in to defray the cost of caring for the animals while they are housed with us, and fees for adoption help with that. If you look at the cost breakdown and consider what you get with the animal, the amount the Rescue gets is actually rather small. Factor in the chip cost, the spay/neuter voucher cost, the shots required, the wages paid to workers at the rescue (the number of which are minimal), the overhead costs (water/sewer, electric, et cetera), it's not even a break-even deal. We lose money on it, which is one reason why additional funding and donations are always needed.

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8. Why don't you do rabies vaccination? Because by law we cannot. Only a veterinarian's office can do that.

9. Do you take animals in from other counties, such as Baker or Umatilla? For a while, we were. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla had contracted with us to take strays from the reservation, although Pendleton now has a PAWS branch, so we don't do that anymore. Very occasionally we would get an animal from Wallowa or Baker County, but by and large, we're committed to serving Union County, and would feel obligated to take an out-of-county animal only if no other more humane option existed.

10. Why does the Rescue look like a garbage dump? Shouldn't you be making it neater and more inviting? Well, let me ask YOU a question: have you bothered to drop by lately? The Director and a few volunteers have DRAMATICALLY straightened up. It does indeed look neat and inviting, at least to those who stop by and comment on it.

11. Is the Board full? No, not at this writing. We had an unfortunate turn-over of Board members that either weren't doing their jobs or ended up in disagreements with BMHA members about the direction the Board should go. Additionally, we have a Board member who has yet to show up for a meeting, and another who moved across the country but still expected to have a Board vote, which is ridiculous, if you ask me. The remaining Board members agree, and these two do-nothing members will be removed according to our by-laws. So we're in a rebuilding phase. We have a core of dedicated members who have been involved with the Rescue since before the change in leadership 5 years ago, so we have a strong base to build from going forward.

12. Why are there members of the Board who are married to each other? Seriously, this is what keeps you up at night? I understand the implication---that those two Board members will be unable to vote independently. Well, if you really want, I'll resign, but I don't think you want that...There have been married Board members at least twice before, under the prior leadership, so there's a precedent for it, and if it was not considered a conflict of interest then, I don't really see how it could be construed as such now. And to think that two individuals cannot vote independently because they are married is a little old-fashioned, at least to my view. It suggests marriage is all about power and control of one person over the other.

13. Where are the fees listed on the website? On the Available Animals page, in the description of our adoption practices and explanation of why we charge fees in the first place.

14. Where is the financial information? On the BMHA page. Click on that and you'll see a link to current tax returns.

15. Why are your hours of operation so restrictive? Because we were very low on funds and had to make some difficult decisions and cut-backs. You may have noticed that, starting in February, we will be open 4 days a week and the first Saturday of each month. Saturdays were always problematic because people would dump their kids off and leave, making us a de-facto daycare rather than a Rescue. But we're willing to give it a shot again.

16. How many paid staff do you have? At this time, two, not counting the Director. Did you know the Director waived his salary the first 3 years he was in the position? Did you know that one Board member

volunteers to run the front counter 3 days a week, saving us a lot of payroll dollars? Our regular front counter help will be returning from maternity leave in January, allowing us to extend the hours as noted above.

17. Why aren't people allowed into the kennel area? Are you hiding something back there? We DO allow people in the kennel area, if a staff member has time to escort them. Otherwise, no. Our insurance carrier would like us to not even allow that, but we felt it was a reasonable compromise. The Board agrees with this policy, not only because it is a reasonable compromise but also because it helps to minimize trauma to the animals. And it certainly protects us from a lawsuit if someone slipped and fell after the kennels had been cleaned, or a child stuck their finger into a run and was bitten.

18. Why don't you take in strays? We do, frequently. Animal Control brings them in to us all the time. We also do take animals that the public brings to us, if we're not already at capacity. If they come in via Animal Control, we're obligated to take them, and we do. If the public brings them in, it's a different issue. Here's why: If Animal Control brings a dog to a facility the County works with as a shelter, the County by state law is obligated to compensate that facility \$27.00/day per dog for five days (there are NO similar laws regarding cats, by the way). Union County wasn't even doing that, for a period of 5 years, but that's an issue for another day. Only in 2016 did the County begin to provide that compensation as required by law; and beginning with the new contract in 2017, the County will provide quarterly support of \$12,500.00/quarter in lieu of any other payments and fees. But here's the rotten thing about the law: if a citizen brings an animal in, the County is under no obligation to provide any compensation whatsoever, whether it's a dog or some other animal. That means there is a cost borne by the rescue for that animal. Now, that doesn't mean we will refuse to take the animal. But we do have a maximum capacity, and I guarantee we will never again be in the position of having nearly 90 cats, which is about triple to quadruple our capacity for cats.

19. Why are you so selective about the animals you take? I wouldn't say we're selective, but we have a capacity, and there are some things we cannot take. Wolf hybrids, for example, which we've been asked to take. Animals the owners are dumping on us because the animal is seriously ill and the owner doesn't want to take responsibility for (ask me sometime about the dog who developed terminal kidney failure a week after owner surrender). With cats, we reach capacity pretty quickly, because so many cat owners are irresponsible about spay/neuter. I've lost count of how many people own a cat but say they cannot afford to get it fixed, so they don't. There's where your feral cat problem comes from, in large measure. Nevertheless, in every case, we try to find a solution that is best for the animal; for example, we put people in touch with breed-specific rescues, or other general rescues.

20. An audit was ordered in 2012, and it was the opinion of the County's legal representation at the time that no contract would be signed until such an audit was done. Was that audit completed? Hmm. That's well before my time on the Board, but my understanding was that it was not, primarily because our financial documents clearly showed where the money went and made an audit a moot point, at least to the satisfaction of the Commissioners. You can look for yourself, by looking at our Federal returns. It costs a lot of money to run a high-save facility. The Rescue was also much less selective about which animals it took in, and that incurred enormous costs in veterinary bills and medications. Was the Rescue run inefficiently? Almost certainly yes. Will that happen again? It can't, because we don't have the resources to run a less-than-tight ship. We've instituted many cost-cutting measures and have more

in the works. Our biggest costs are utilities and payroll, and with the increases in minimum wage coming over the next few years, those costs will only increase. I'm also planning on publishing Quarterly income/outgo spreadsheets to the website so people can see exactly where the money is going.

21. Why has the Rescue gone so far down the toilet? That's a pretty strong condemnation, mostly based on the reality that we don't take every animal in and therefore be forced to kill thousands. Do we take every animal? Of course not. I've explained in great detail why we cannot. But does that mean the Rescue has gone "down the toilet?" As I said, matter of opinion.

22. Why aren't you doing a CNR (capture/neuter/release) program to help control the feral cat problem? Isn't that part of BMHA's job? I would argue that it is not, or at least, not the job of the Rescue, and the County Commissioners, through Steve McClure, have affirmed that. As I've said before, I've done research on these programs, and the research on the subject shows that they do NOT work UNLESS there are TWO important pieces of the puzzle in place (and I've been misquoted publicly as saying they don't work, period, which is NOT TRUE). What are these pieces?

a) Thorough coverage. Most studies show that to get any kind of effective feral cat control, 60-90% coverage must be achieved, meaning that 60-90% of colonies must be recognized and in those colonies, 60-90% of the ferals must be neutered. Achieving that in Union County is well beyond the scope of the Rescue at this time. Could it happen in the future? Perhaps, with enough volunteer time and a SIGNIFICANT source of funding. But even this will be doomed to failure unless:

b) There is SIGNIFICANT buy-in by owners regarding owner responsibility. A CNR program will be spinning its wheels without owners taking responsibility for neutering their cats. And in this County (indeed, most places), that's a tall order. People are often furiously independent, and resent others telling them what they have to do. Others may feel it's an unwarranted financial burden. So without serious buy-in by the public at large, perhaps by legislation or ordinance regarding cat ownership similar to what is already in place for dogs, such programs are likely to not succeed in reducing the feral population significantly.

Does that mean we're ignoring the problem? No. As I've noted, we've identified a donor who is willing to set up an account to assist low-income households with paying for spay/neuter procedures, and we're hoping that once it's in place, the public will match it---indeed, the donor may make it a requirement for the Rescue to receive the money and get the program set up. But we simply cannot indiscriminately take in every stray cat, and we cannot afford to neuter them all.

I do want to say, to those of you who have chosen to take on this nearly insoluble problem---it's admirable. You should be commended for your selfless efforts. You have no doubt had setbacks and stumbles along the way, just as we have in facing the challenges of the future. But you also need to understand that the Rescue's mission is changing, as all things change, in our case necessitated by financial and legal changes. This is not the same world as ten or even five years ago, and the Rescue cannot simply remain static in the face of such changes. Some people will be angered by that. Some will welcome the changes. But for good or ill, things are changing, and we have to adapt as best we can.

23. Why are you still going to be getting licensing fees? We aren't. Look at the contract, posted at our website. The County is taking over licensing and keeping those fees to defray the cost of the contract.

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The contract is really designed to be a zero-dollar outcome. The County takes in licensing fees, fines, and so forth, and negotiates with the cities for them to contribute. The county will now provide us a flat fee of \$12,500.00/quarter to provide the services as described in the contract. We don't collect the licensing fees in addition. In this way, the County really doesn't have any expenditure for the contract once the licensing and enforcement pictures are more soundly in place. We ARE continuing to collect a redemption fee for dogs brought in by Animal Control or concerned citizens because it helps defray the cost of caring for the animal and acts as a stimulus for greater owner responsibility regarding their dogs being at large. The County Commissioners have already noted that owner responsibility is a problem that needs to be part of the picture.

24. Do you still have the steel isolation cages for cats? Yes, we do. On the recommendation of one of the cat-specific rescues we work with, they were moved out of the prior location and into our quarantine room, which relates to another question:

25. Do you quarantine cats? Of course. It's the most responsible and smart thing to do, especially with cats. Cats can be carriers of ringworm and respiratory infections and be contagious without showing symptoms. Moreover, ringworm is difficult to spot. We do use the UV light technique, which is about the only way to reliably detect it. It would not do for us to have roomfuls of cats with ringworm, though we've dealt with it in the past when our cat intake policy was much looser.

26. Why did you start boarding dogs? Why don't you keep that space open for more animals coming in? We had to find inventive ways to generate revenue, given the bleak revenue picture we were faced with (no money from the County or cities, donations markedly going down). We really had no choice. And if we're at capacity, we have to turn away potential boarding opportunities. We are a rescue, first and foremost, and we haven't forgotten that, nor will we.

27. Why do you only charge \$19.00/day for boarding but \$27.00/day for dogs brought in by Animal Control and then redeemed to the owner? Isn't that just greed? Boarders typically provide their own bedding, their own food, and other necessities, so the cost of boarding is lower than the cost of caring for strays or dangerous dogs brought in by Animal Control.

28. Why is the Director now living at the Rescue? Doesn't that just show that you people can't manage your own lives, much less the Rescue itself? No, it shows nothing of the sort. First, it's not illegal, as some people have implied. We are zoned heavy industrial, and La Grande zoning ordinances allow a caretaker to live on-site. So he is. It certainly cuts down on his room and board costs for himself, and moreover it allows after-hours drop-off to proceed much more smoothly than in the past. Keep in mind, the Director waived his salary the first three years he was in that position, which was really a hugely generous and selfless act, and even now is drawing only \$10,000.00/year rather than the \$18,000.00/year he is entitled to. That's not a lot to live on. So it's perfectly fine. It certainly does not reflect an inability to take care of one's own life. What I and other Board members resent is the fact that some people in this community lump us in under the umbrella of being incapable of managing our lives.

29. Didn't the County take away licensing because you were incapable of managing it properly? If you could raise so much money from licensing, why didn't you? Because we are not law-enforcement officers and have no authority to enforce the law. Licensing was always a voluntary thing in the sense that we had no authority to compel people to follow licensing law, which has always been in place, and

it is up to law enforcement officers to enforce the laws regarding licensing. Since we cannot write citations or actively enforce the law, we were only able to require that people whose unlicensed dogs were brought to us by animal control purchase a license before we released their dog(s) to them. We had no ability to actively pursue licensing in any capacity as enforcers of the law. Frankly, we're happy the County is taking over licensing, because they have the authority to require Animal Control to do a better job of enforcement, something we were never legally able to do. So we weren't "incapable" of managing it; in fact, we did as much as we possibly could. The County is taking it over so they can centralize it and create a database for better enforcement of licensing laws.

As I am made aware of additional issues or concerns, I will update this document or create new documents with more specific subjects.

And now, a question or two for you:

Why have I and other BMHA personnel and Rescue workers been blocked from sites such as the Eastern Oregon Pet-Lover's Classified Facebook Page? If people in this County truly wish to be inclusive and have transparency, why the blocks?

Why do we continue to be misquoted and misrepresented by the media (case in point: the article in the Observer regarding the Contract contained several errors of fact)?

Why do so many owners of animals in this County continue to irresponsibly fail to neuter their pets, when such procedures are in the best interest of both the animal and the owners?

Why do so many cat owners, after failing to responsibly neuter their animals, allow said animals to roam the neighborhood and therefore become pregnant?

It's a two-way street, people. And it's unfortunate that many of the people who are critical of the Rescue won't even bother to read this, preferring the comfort of their own innuendo, opinions, beliefs, disinformation, misinformation, and rumors. But that doesn't help anybody move forward from here.



John Rinehart, Acting BMHA President