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Shelby animal shelter receives A rating

Included on list of best animal shelters in Kentucky

By Lisa King

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Lisa King

The Shelby County Animal Shelter is one of just a few shelters around the state chosen as model facilities for Kentucky.

Shelby County is of 17 animal shelters around the state that have been named as model shelters for Kentucky, while the vast majority of shelters fell far short, officials say.

That's the finding of a study conducted by the University of Kentucky and the Lincoln Memorial University College of Veterinary Medicine in an investigation all of the state's 90 county-run animal shelters, said University of Kentucky Professor Cynthia Gaskill, who headed up the project.

The group presented their findings, called the Current Status of Kentucky County Animal Shelters in August to the Kentucky Animal Control Advisory Board in Frankfort, she said, adding that each shelter was rated by how well it complied with the state's minimum standards set by state law in 2007.

"We tried to determine any stumbling blocks or major obstacles that they had in order to provide the care they wanted for their shelter animals," she said. "That's the kind of data that the students collected, and what they found was that the vast majority of county shelters in Kentucky indicated they didn't have sufficient funding to maintain their facilities or make repairs or to maintain staff."

Deficiencies in state mandates

Gaskill said that the study was done at this time because the state standards were put into place about a decade ago and the university wanted to see how much improvement – if any – has taken place during that time.

"All counties were supposed to be in compliance by 2007 and since then, nobody at the state level or anyplace else has looked to see whether the counties are in compliance with state law," she said. "Our interest was in finding out how many counties are having trouble meeting the bare requirements – is it just a handful of counties, or is it a vast majority of counties – that was the question."

The results were not promising overall, she said.

"What we found was that well over fifty percent of the counties in Kentucky have significant deficiencies or do not meet the state laws," she said. "Another thirty percent have some issues but they're working as hard as they can and are really doing fairly well. A small number, seventeen counties, are just doing quite well and have overcome a lot of their obstacles."

Minimum standards set by the Kentucky Humane Shelter Act that required shelters to be in compliance by 2007 are the following:

- § Existence of a basic shelter
- § Daily uncontaminated food and water
- § Cleanliness
- § Public access to shelters
- § Humane methods of euthanasia
- § Protection from weather
- § Adequate lighting, ventilation and room for free movement of animals
- § Separate holding areas for injured or ill animals as well as a quarantine area
- § Maintain proper records

Shelby County Animal Shelter Director Leon Federle said that he was pleased with the results of the study.

"We were green on both parts of the study," he said. "If you miss three or more parts of the law, then you're red: I believe most of the counties that surrounded us were mostly yellow."

The color-coded categories that Federle refers to are red (in violation of three or more parts of the law, green (in compliance with all requirements), yellow (in violation of 1 or 2 parts of the law and purple (unsure).

Of Shelby's surrounding counties, Henry, Oldham, Jefferson and Franklin were rated yellow, and Spencer, Bullitt and Anderson were red.

Counties rated green included small clusters in the western and southern portions of the state and a few in Shelby's vicinity – including Nelson, Hardin, Larue and Jessamine. There were also two top rated shelters in northern Kentucky, Boone and Kenton.

Shelby shelter in good shape

Federle said that with 26 dogs and nearly 20 cats, the shelter is close to capacity and that all animals are well cared for.

"We met all the criteria one-hundred percent," he said. "To be in the green, you have to meet one hundred percent of the criteria and that's what we did."

The shelter includes kennels, a quarantine room, a grooming room, a barn and field for livestock, and extensive facilities for cats, including a condo room and a room for stray cats, he said.

"Until they get checked out, they go in the stray room until they get moved up to the adoption room," he said. "We have the barn for the livestock. A couple of weeks ago we had a potbellied pig, and before that we had two goats, so it's good that we have that pasture in the back for that."

The grooming room was installed last year with a grant that was used to purchase a large bathtub with a removable side portion so the dog can walk right in instead of having to be lifted.

Federle said that feature comes in very handy since animals are bathed often, especially for those animals that are brought in infested with fleas or ticks.

"If your county was on that list of model shelters, that's excellent, because that meant you're providing good programs and really meeting state requirements," said Gaskill. "Those on the model shelter list are going above and beyond with having spay/neuter programs, adoptions, things that are not even required by the state."

She added the hope is that the study will provide an impetus for improvement around the state.

"With this information, maybe our state legislators could make more money available to counties to apply for grants, so hopefully this will be an incentive to allocate more money for that," she said.

Shelby County Deputy Judge-Executive Rusty Newton, former animal shelter director until Federle was hired in 2013, said he puts a lot of stock in the study's findings.

"The University of Kentucky conducted this study and they didn't just stick their heads in the door to do it," he said. "This was a detailed analysis of how shelters operate and a large number of factors went into it. It was very gratifying to learn that we are one of the few model shelters in the state."