

PET NEWS

Lee County Animal Services open for dog adoptions

SPECIAL TO FLORIDA WEEKLY

After suspending adoptions following the illness of several dogs, the Lee County Animal Services is again open for adoptions.

The agency suspended adoptions Feb. 8 after several dogs began showing signs of unusual illness for sheltered pets; Canine Respiratory Corona Virus. Dr. Cynda Crawford, a veterinarian at the University of Florida presently studying shelter illnesses across the state, was able to identify the cause of the new strain of virus.

Recent tests run from samples of newly admitted dogs showed they are not infected.

The following are the facts about the virus and Animal Services' handling of the situation.

- Animal Services staff, at the recommendation of veterinarians who deal with contagious disease, took immediate steps to contain, isolate, and eliminate the virus so that it did not spread to incoming animals. This was a vital step as Animal Services is a government-operated, open-admission shelter that must continue taking in animals regardless of space. Private, non-profit shelters are not bound by this law and may limit admission based on availability of space.

- Since the diagnosis, extensive measures have been taken to remove the virus from the air since it is an air-borne virus. It can also be spread by contact just like human viruses are transmitted.

- The virus has affected only a few of the approximately 1,200 animals that were processed through the shelter in the last month. While there is no vaccine to prevent it, it is treatable and only 3-5 percent of those affected have become seriously ill. Less than 1 percent died.

- While the virus is treatable for adopted pets residing in a home environment, the same results are not achieved in a shelter environment. Animals in mass housing situations will continue to pass the virus back and forth thus spreading it to incoming animals and resulting in more infected animals that would need to be euthanized. The stress of being sheltered suppresses the immune system, further preventing the animal's recovery.

- Animal Service has not refused to treat the dogs due to lack of concern or funds. Some dogs did not respond to the prescribed treatment given to them in the shelter environment.

- Animals entering shelters are not always well cared for prior to their arrival at the shelter. They are well cared for by the shelter staff but their owner's failure to vaccinate them and the resulting lack of immunities they have to disease put them at risk.

- Adopter's sign a contract acknowledging that they understand there are no health guarantees for animals with unknown backgrounds and medical histories and they are responsible for providing any care the animal needs once they have adopted it. The dog adoption processing fee is \$65 and comes with approximately \$400 worth of medical and other services to get the animal started on its new life.

- Animals are humanely euthanized by state-certified caring staff when necessary.

- Pet owners do not need to worry that it will infect their pets if they have given them routine proper care and use common sense when they come in contact with other people's pets.

Lee County Animal Services provides animal control services throughout Lee County

and operates an animal shelter to house stray and abandoned domestic animals. It also administers low-cost spay/neuter programs, educational initiatives, and rabies and bite case control programs. The shelter is located off Six Mile Cypress Parkway next to the Lee County Sheriff's Dept. For information call 239-LEE-PETS 533-7387 or visit Lee County Animal Services online at www.LeeLostPets.com

Gulf Coast Humane Society's hours change

The Gulf Coast Humane Society has changed its hours of operation. The adop-

tion center is now open Monday-Saturday 11 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. and from noon to 3:30 p.m. on Sundays. The last adoption of each day is processed a half-hour prior to closing.

Animal intake hours are now Monday-Saturday 11 a.m. until 4 p.m. There is no Sunday animal intake. Call to confirm that space is available.

The Gulf Coast Humane Society adoption center is located at 2010 Arcadia Street in Fort Myers approximately two miles west of I-75 on Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. For more information call 332-0364. ■

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