



The Rockingham-Harrisonburg SPCA feels that the time has come for us to address the misinformation currently being disseminated about our organization by a group of individuals identifying themselves as the Citizens for Animal Welfare (CAAW). The R-H SPCA has a history of over 35 years experience, knowledge and insight. Many of our present Board of Directors are the core representatives that pledged their talents, support and unending efforts to secure the state of the art shelter that the R-H SPCA now occupies. That enormous goal required four years of planning, campaigning and securing community support. And during this project, the R-H SPCA remained open to the public and continued to serve the needs of animals and citizens of our community. Our new shelter has enabled the R-H SPCA to provide better care to our homeless animals and to uphold and maintain State Veterinary standards. The R-H SPCA has made great strides in its mission “to promote respect, compassion, education, and advocacy resulting in a humane and sustainable environment for all animals.”

Unfortunately, there are those in the community that feel the R-H SPCA has not sufficiently performed its duties. There have been numerous distortions and intentional omissions by this group that the R-H SPCA would like to address.

**Allegations** by CFAW:

**Free spay/neuter services were offered and declined.** This offer was indeed extended to the R-H SPCA in August 2009 by the Shenandoah Valley Spay/Neuter Clinic (SVSNC). Upon receipt of the letter extending the offer, a meeting was held to discuss the proposal. Attending the meeting were our Executive Director, Anne Anderson, the Spay/Neuter Clinic’s Director, Cate Mansfield and a license vet tech of the clinic, Corena Huffman. During the meeting, Ms. Anderson voiced her concerns regarding the precarious outcome previously experienced by animals that had been taken to the clinic for pre-adoption spay/neuter services. Of the 10 presented for services, 7 had to be treated post-op for various infections which temporarily removed them from the adoption program and elongated their stay resulting in these animals occupying precious isolation and foster home resources. The SPCA had not only compensated the clinic for these surgeries but also had the additional cost of the post-surgical treatments. Also discussed during the meeting was the concern of after hours, post-surgical care for the community at large. Ms.

Mansfield indicated that the Spay/Neuter Clinic had an agreement with the Shenandoah Valley Regional Veterinary Emergency Services for such care. Our Board veterinarian questioned the outcomes and the practicality of the need to perform a spay/neuter procedure, exacerbating unnecessary stress upon an already stressed pet in the shelter environment. In good faith and despite the shelter's and the Board's concerns, an additional attempt was made to take advantage of the Spay/Neuter Clinic's offer. Unfortunately, the first two pets served also had post-op complications, and the resolution was made to re-evaluate the proposal. The response from the Spay/Neuter Clinic was defensive, implying the fault was with the R-H SPCA. Subsequent follow-up also revealed that the Spay/Neuter Clinic had suspended the agreement with the Emergency Veterinary Services in January 2009. For this reason and for the good of the animals, the future services of the Spay/Neuter Clinic were declined regarding this procedure. Other veterinary practices have performed similar services with no complications. It should also be noted that the R-H SPCA has supported and worked cooperatively with the Spay/Neuter Clinic on many occasions. Programs and services, such as "Spay Your Mama" and the free spaying and neutering of Pitt Bulls was embraced by the SPCA, as well as referrals to the Spay/Neuter Clinic for low-income citizens. With all instances, the R-H SPCA disseminated information, made referrals and handed out certificates to assist the Spay/Neuter Clinic.

**Free shelter software to computerize records was offered and declined.** To the best of our knowledge and recall, no shelter software has ever been offered. In all honesty, this has been a goal of the R-H SPCA for quite some time. Several software programs have been reviewed as well as the feasibility of purchasing the necessary computer hardware. Grant funding is currently being considered as an option to achieve this goal.

**Multiple offers to transfer animals to other rescue groups were declined.** To the best of our knowledge, the only offer declined by the R-H SPCA was made by Cat's Cradle. The R-H SPCA has specific criteria for approval as a rescue group: ([Attachment A](#)) Cat's Cradle was unable to provide this documentation. Additionally, on a number of occasions, the R-H SPCA has received calls of complaint from citizens stating that Cat's Cradle did not answer its phone, did not return calls for assistance and indicated it could not accept additional felines. The R-H SPCA is also aware that Cat's Cradle practices Trap Neuter and Return (TNR) in the city of Harrisonburg. Current Harrisonburg city codes are not conducive to this effort. Furthermore, Cat's Cradle has consistently failed to notify the R-H SPCA of strays it has taken in, which is a violation of current Virginia animal welfare laws. As evidenced by a past newspaper article, Cat's Cradle is known to place into the community felines positive for feline immunodeficiency. In assessing the situation, the R-H SPCA determined that Cat's Cradle was not conducting itself in a reputable and responsible manner. Therefore, approval could not be granted until such

issues were resolved. The R-H SPCA is unaware of any other rescue groups offered by the CFAW. The R-H SPCA works successfully with a host of reputable rescue organizations, which includes its participation in the PetSmart Charities Rescue Waggin' program.

**A life saving model was proposed to the R-H SPCA Director and Board by animal welfare leaders but was declined.** The R-H Executive Director and the Board have no knowledge of a presentation of such a model. Ms. Josie Kinkade of Cat's Cradle attended a Board meeting in the summer of 2007 to present information regarding TNR. Numerous questions were asked by Board Members during the meeting, such as the monitoring of the feral cat colonies to ensure annual vaccinations to prevent the spread of disease and its possible impact on the public; maintaining the regular feeding and watering of these feral cats; assessing their impact upon the native wildlife; evaluating the health and general well-being of each feral cat, and continuing veterinary care, etc. Ms. Kinkade was to return to the next Board meeting with follow-up information addressing the Board's concerns. Ms. Kinkade never returned nor did she follow up.

**Other concerns expressed by CFAW that are unfounded.** In October of 2009, the R-H SPCA prepared a letter for City and County officials regarding euthanasia numbers highlighting data that was not reflected in the raw numbers. ([Attachment B](#)) Without a considerable increase in resources, progress in this area will be slow as the vast majority of pets received upon intake from the community are unvaccinated, sick and behaviorally unsound. Considerable financial resources have been invested by the R-H SPCA to lower the euthanasia rates from 76% in 2004 to 62% in 2009. Sometimes, euthanasia has to be conducted to protect the general population from highly contagious diseases due to the lack of unlimited isolation and recuperative areas. The R-H SPCA must also take into consideration public safety pertaining to the placement of a behaviorally questionable pet into the community.

**CFAW often compares the R-H SPCA to the Charlottesville/Albemarle Shelter.** The fact is that the Charlottesville-Albemarle shelter has far greater financial resources, and the community demographics are quite different. Harrisonburg/Rockingham County has a strong agri-business demographic make-up. There are also the differences with intake policies between the Charlottesville shelter and the R-H SPCA. The greatest difference is that Charlottesville reserves the right to deny entry of a pet should it be determined that the pet has a major medical or behavioral problem. The R-H SPCA currently has an open admission policy and, therefore, will not turn away any pet in need. The R-H SPCA, by no means, wishes to belittle the accomplishments of the Charlottesville/Albemarle Shelter. The R-H SPCA acknowledges its accomplishments and joins it in celebration of its success. The R-H SPCA Executive Director has met with the Charlottesville/Albemarle Director. In fact, the R-H SPCA has incorporated some of its sister organization's ideas

within the framework of the R-H SPCA. As resources allow, the R-H SPCA will continue to follow the progress and ideas of the Charlottesville/Albemarle Shelter.

It is unfortunate that the actions and statements of a well-organized few have adversely affected so many knowledgeable and caring employees of the R-H SPCA. It is just as unfortunate that this membership, whose names are withheld from public information, can distort and intentionally omit facts. The R-H SPCA is guilty, obviously, of not being able to more effectively educate and enlighten the community it serves. For that, the Board humbly apologizes. The limited resources at its disposal have necessitated the concentration of efforts on animal welfare rather than educational outreach.

For the record, it is an oxymoron to state that the public is not responsible for the thousands of homeless animals throughout the city and county when the state of Virginia requires the existence of a shelter in each locality to deal with the enormous overpopulation problem. Pet overpopulation is the result of human intervention, or the lack thereof. The more awareness that pet owners and the public have, the more successful our society will be at resolving pet overpopulation. In the meantime, organizations such as the R-H SPCA and the Shenandoah Valley Spay/Neuter Clinic are a necessary part of reaching the solution.

The R-H SPCA is not the irresponsible party here. There is much that the organization does that goes unrecognized by the public and the community at large. The R-H SPCA encourages each of you to visit the shelter and spend a few hours or days to observe the staff performing their daily duties: dealing with an individual who suddenly drops off 10 dogs or 30 cats in an hour's period; assessing the general health and behavior of each animal during the intake process; trying to make space in the stray/isolation/quarantine areas, making arrangements for medical care and administration of required vaccinations by volunteer veterinarians who already have their own practices to serve; ensuring that all dog kennels and cat cages are cleaned and sanitized daily; determining which animals must be euthanized due to overwhelming health or behavioral issues; accessing and addressing the needs of sick and injured animals, and so on. You watch the consternation in the staff's faces, the sadness in their voices and body language as they go through the process of euthanizing a cat or dog.

There is much that the R-H SPCA does to avoid ending the life of a cat or dog. Staff members and volunteers perform temperament testing daily for each and every homeless canine. To ease overpopulation in the shelter or to address a pet's specific need, there are foster care providers and rescue organizations that are called upon as needed. There is intense organization and cooperation between all the participating entities to meet the constantly changing, ever-evolving physical and emotional needs of every homeless pet.

But some animals cannot be saved, despite all these efforts. Feral and barn cats are a prime example. It is not unusual for the R-H SPCA to receive as many as 20 to 40 cats a day in the spring, summer and fall seasons. During these periods, every cat area (stray, adoptable, isolation and quarantine) is filled to capacity. Thus begins the tough decision-making process. Calls must be made to foster care providers to determine if they can lend a hand. And if an opening can be found, consideration has to be given to adoptability and the individual cat's physical and emotional needs. Unfortunately for the feral cat population, there are no adoption opportunities.

After much research and discussion, the R-H SPCA established a policy regarding the euthanasia of feral cats. Unfortunately, in our community citizens are often known to take matters into their own hands. The R-H SPCA has witnessed these horrific outcomes on many occasions. There is also significant research to show that feral cat colonies are unsuccessful. The feral cats are not consistently maintained with food and water; they are not given routine veterinary care; annual vaccines are not monitored; and the feral cats can also be a threat to public safety and are often perceived as a nuisance. Moreover, feral cats pose a human health risk because rabies vaccines are not monitored, the overpopulations can affect water supplies; and they pose a significant threat to native wildlife. For all the above reasons, the R-H SPCA recommends to prospective adopters that they keep their cat indoors where it can enjoy a long, happy life, away from the outdoor dangers of cars, predators or exposure to feline diseases.

CFAW, Cat's Cradle and the Shenandoah Valley Spay/Neuter Clinic are particularly opposed to the high percentage of cats euthanized; in fact, these organizations strongly support and participate in Trap Neuter and Return (TNR). A significant number (19%) of the cats that are brought in the shelter are feral; consequently, cat euthanasia numbers are quite high. Other factors such as health, temperament and behavior also dramatically affect these numbers. From both an ethical and environmental standpoint, the R-H SPCA is opposed to TNR. Supporting the R-H SPCA's position on feral cats and TNR is the Wildlife Center of Virginia. Specifically, the Wildlife Center of Virginia cites that one out of every five injured animal that enters its facility is a victim of a cat. Ed Clark, President of the Wildlife Center of Virginia, noted that based on the number of birds that are brought into the wildlife rehabilitation centers across the United States, it could be determined that cats are killing tens of millions of birds annually.

There is another issue that the R-H SPCA would like to address regarding CFAW, Cat's Cradle and the Shenandoah Valley Spay/Neuter Clinic. The process and methods used by these organizations to malign and demoralize the organization, its staff, volunteers, supporters, and Board have been some of the most irresponsible and negative acts that any organization can commit against another. The distortions, intentional omissions and

false statements show a lack of regard for fellow individuals who have the best interests of the animal at heart. The lack of professionalism has been profound. If these organizations wanted to perform a positive, constructive service to the community and to demonstrate a genuine respect for and spirit of cooperation with other organizations, it would have been prudent at the very least to have had a round table discussion of differences prior to embarking on their fallacious campaign. Perhaps careful consideration should be given to any organization or group of individuals that engages in maligning tactics without regard to constructive problem resolution and differences of opinion.

Executive Director Robin Starr of the Richmond SPCA made a similar observation and expressed it eloquently in one of her CEO messages to Richmond SPCA supporters: **“Spreading distorted information about a charitable organization that is untrue and damaging to it is terribly irresponsible.** People who act in such a manner do not sincerely care about the mission of the organization they seek to damage and they do not have the best interests of those who depend on that organization at heart, in this case, the animals. Every organization must choose the path they believe is right for them, and the choice is neither black nor white but many shades of gray. We respect the right of organizations to choose a different path than ours and expect that they will show us the same courtesy.”