

# PEKIN **Daily Times**

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## Pet owners face hard choices

By Ed McMenamin

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PEKIN — This year looks to be a bad one for cats and dogs, said Bob Marshall, director of Tazewell County Animal Control.

The sputtering economy has forced people to make budget cuts — and that often means the family dog gets the short end of the stick.

The number of animals surrendered to animal control by owners more than doubled in December and January when compared to last year, Marshall said.

In January, the shelter took in 37 animals, compared to 15 one year ago. Fifty-four were received in December, compared to 28 the previous year.

"People coming in are saying 'We have to move out of the area to find a job and a new place can't take the animals,'" Marshall said. "You've got to feed your family and worry about bills before you worry about vet bills."

Dogs that aren't adopted or taken in by the Tazewell Animal Protective Society no-kill animal shelter (TAPS) are euthanized.

"Everybody's got a bunch of dogs, and nobody wants them," Marshall said. "If this economy keeps sliding, it's probably going to get worse."

He said animal control holds all pets for five working days. At that point, the shelter designates old and big dogs for euthanasia.

"Nobody wants those — it's too bad" he said. "Everybody wants a small- or medium-sized dog."

He said after another five or more days, the dogs with bad attitudes are pulled from the group and euthanized.

"We can't adopt out something that could be a dangerous dog," he said. "You get the best of what we have up for adoption."

He said he hopes adoptions rise along with temperatures, as they typically do.

TAPS has a waiting list, and its facilities are at capacity. TAPS Director Angela Blackman said more cats have been finding adoptive families than dogs, and the shelter has seen an uptick in the number of dogs brought in.

"We've seen a lot of large dogs being surrendered," she said. "It's harder to bring them with (when families relocate). You have to have a home or rental that allows dogs, or has space for them."

She said it's typical to see more cats adopted than dogs in the winter, but she said

economic factors, not just seasonal patterns, appear to be influencing the increased number of dogs surrendered.

Blackman said the shelter warns families on the waiting list that it can take as long as three months to find room.

"We only have so much space," she said. "We do try to put animals in foster homes if we can."

Blackman said there are currently six families on the small dog or puppy waiting list, but that some families on the list have litters of puppies or more than one dog. There are 44 families on the large dog list, she said, and most of them have only one dog.

There are 42 names on the cat owner waiting list.

"Those do tend to be more groups," she said. "One person has nine cats. One person has two cats. You typically see more of the two-to-four range."

Blackman said she has had stray cats brought to the clinic that were already spayed and de-clawed, leading her to believe that economic reasons led families to dump the cats.

She said the shelter offers low-cost services to spay, neuter and de-claw animals, and that high veterinarian bills are often a hurdle that prevents many people from taking in strays.

"We can spay or neuter a feral or stray animal for \$30 — certain qualifications apply," she said. "I wish we had more money where we could help everybody."

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