Volunteer Vickie Stevens holds a rat terrier named Chico as she and Lafayette Animal Control Supervisor Virginia Leestand in a room with dogs that have recently been spayed and neutered. The city-parish is partnering with a national animal welfare group with the aim to reduce euthanizations at the center.

Lafayette teams up with animal welfare group to reduce euthanizations

BY RICHARD BURGESS
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Lafayette city-parish government is teaming up with a national animal welfare group in an effort to drastically reduce the number of cats and dogs euthanized at the Lafayette Animal Control Center.

Mayor-President Joel Robideaux announced Tuesday that Target Zero has awarded the city a fellowship that comes with up to three years of training, monitoring and other assistance to transition to a no-kill shelter.

“No kill” doesn’t mean the shelter will no longer euthanize cats and dogs, but it generally describes a policy of killing only terminally ill or dangerous animals.

Target Zero program Director Sara Pizano said the goal is to euthanize no more than 10 percent of the animals that come into the shelter.

That’s a far cry from the roughly 79 percent of cats and dogs euthanized there last year, according to figures from an assessment Target Zero did at the shelter earlier this year.

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Lafayette Mayor-President Joel Robideaux speaks at Lafayette City Hall on Tuesday during a news conference to announce a partnership between Lafayette Consolidated Government and Target Zero, an organization that helps communities transition their animal shelter programs to a no-kill status.
Pizano said she is confident Lafayette can quickly turn that number around because the administration seems committed to change. "You will be the greatest success story probably in the United States this year," she said.

Robideaux said the animal shelter will quickly implement procedures aimed at improving adoption rates at the shelter and reducing the number of animals brought there.

Among the changes:
- The shelter will form a "live outcome team" focused on getting animals out of the shelter as soon as possible.
- The number of public adoption events will be increased.
- Volunteers will work with owners considering giving up their animals to arrange for foster pet care or to offer education on pet ownership or veterinary assistance that could make it easier to keep a pet.
- The shelter will work to keep cats out of the shelter by sterilizing and then releasing cats back into the community rather than sending the animals in the shelter.

Keeping animals out of the shelter is critical, Robideaux said.

Making our intake is the biggest step we can take in managing our kill rates at the shelter," he said.

Robideaux, who took office in January, took an early interest in improvements at the animal shelter.

The "no-kill" initiatives come as city-parish government is planning for new 20,000-square-foot animal shelter to replace the current 6,000-square-foot facility.

LAFFAYETTE ANIMAL CONTROL CENTER STATISTICS

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Animals Released Live</th>
<th>Animals Euthanized</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>928</td>
<td>3,316</td>
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<tr>
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Source: Lafayette Animal Control Center

Advocate graphic