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Clinic saves animals, one operation at a time

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Veterinarian Heidi Strand of SPCA in Oakland, Calif., helped spay and neuter 100 dogs and cats for free Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2008. Bishop Ranch Veterinary Center & Urgent Care teamed up with the Oakland SPCA in order to give 100 surgeries to pets of low income households.

OAKLAND - FIGHTING TO SAVE animals' lives, veterinarians spayed and neutered 100 East Bay pets for free Tuesday.

The East Bay Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Spay and Neuter Clinic of Oakland hosted the event, which targeted low-income homes with cats and dogs in need of the surgeries.

"This is like a life-send, a miracle," said Chabot College student Regina Martinez, of San Leandro.

She'd brought Lucy, a pit bull she's had for four months, to get spayed. "We're trying to keep this breed going, improving their reputation so they don't get banned," she said.

Hayward resident Arturo Langarica, 53, lives on a fixed income. He came with Carnela, his 5-month-old Chihuahua, to become the first in his family to have a pet fixed.

"This is a new beginning for both of them," said Maria Bland, a friend of Langarica's. "He couldn't have afforded to keep her without this surgery, and he couldn't afford to pay to have it done."

This is the clinic's second annual day of free pet surgeries, and they hope to continue the event for a long time, Director of Development and Marketing M. Eliza Fried said.

"We usually do about 40 surgeries a day," Fried said. "So, this is a big day for us. We've got two doctors and two techs volunteering from **Bishop Ranch Veterinary Center**, and we're really excited to be able to do this for the community."

A day of surgeries costs the clinic about \$5,000. Pet owners usually pay up to \$100 for the surgery, "but every surgery loses money," Fried said. "We always charge less than the surgeries cost us to perform.

Speaking to reporters while spaying an unconscious cat, Dr. Heidi Strand said she enjoys knowing her work improves not just the life of her patient but the community as well.

"It reduces the chance of the animal developing cancer, but it also cuts down on things like dog violence," Strand said. "A neutered dog is a lot less likely to go out and bite someone."

Unaltered cats can birth up to 18 kittens each year, unaltered dogs up to 20 puppies. When the offspring are unable to find adoptive homes, they risk being put down, Fried said.

According to figures collected by the clinic, euthanasia rates for dogs and cats in Alameda County have dropped 60 percent in the last decade. Fried said she believes the

80,000 surgeries the clinic has performed in that time helped. To qualify for free surgery, pet owners must live in Alameda or Contra Costa county and have a household income below \$40,000. All 100 surgeries require appointments, which filled quickly this year, Fried said.

"We usually start taking appointments in December, and the Free Neuter/Spay Day is usually on the last Tuesday in February," Fried said.

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