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MONTANA SPAY/NEUTER TASK FORCE  
P.O. BOX 70  
VICTOR, MONTANA 59875

For immediate release

Contact: Jean Atthowe, Montana Spay/Neuter Task Force, [jatthowe@montana.com](mailto:jatthowe@montana.com),  
406-777-2644  
Elaine Kristiansen, Sheridan “Be a Winner – Prevent a Litter” Community Pet  
Care Host Committee Chair, [elainekrist@gmail.com](mailto:elainekrist@gmail.com), 307-752-5807

555 SHERIDAN DOGS AND CATS AND THEIR COMMUNITY NOW HEADED  
FOR BETTER LIVES

When the last dog and cat left the rain drenched Sheridan County Fairgrounds on Sunday night, May 22, they followed 555 area dogs and cats already headed for their homes - now spayed, neutered, and many vaccinated and micro-chipped. They were the beneficiaries of hundreds of well wishers and volunteers – school children, county commissioners, city council members, business and civic leaders, and local veterinarians and technicians.

The occasion was “Be a Winner, Prevent a Litter” Sheridan Community Pet Care Event held May 20 to 22. Two hundred volunteers assisted five Montana Spay/Neuter Task Force veterinarians who participate with the Task Force and four Sheridan veterinarians, Drs. Jenn Gage, Mack Bischoff, Karen Serres, and Erin Pederson, who donated their time and skills along with seven area technicians, for this first pet care event. The centerpiece was a no cost demonstration spay/neuter assistance clinic for residents and their pets in need of such help.

“I am thrilled and impressed by the kindness and care I see with the staff and volunteers,” commented Karen D.” She brought in two neighbor cats because she feared they would not be neutered or given shots. Both were in heat. Karen left with a nine month old female cat and two small kittens. “Two young girls are going to ask their daddies about the kittens, so I may end up with one, or three cats.” Many clients told of inheriting their dog from a relative who died, of being given two cats, or dogs, or finding a cat and litter under their porch. One kitten fell out of barn loft weighing only one pound. All these owners had recently lost jobs, were on disability, on social security, or were single mothers. All wanted to do the “right thing” for their pets, “stop overpopulation” and to keep their pets from wandering.

At the invitation of the Sheridan County Commission and the Sheridan City Council, the Montana Spay/Neuter Task Force traveled to its neighbor state to help create this event with a local host committee headed by Elaine and Rachel Kristiansen of the Second Chance Sheridan Cat Rescue.

The Task Force brought in a small, brightly colored yellow van most of the equipment and supplies needed by participating veterinarians and volunteers. Working closely as a team with Elaine Kristiansen and her new team, Task Force set up in an existing building thus imbedding the whole event in the community; the community takes ownership of the problems of pet overpopulation and the solution. "Pet overpopulation is not an owner problem, or a veterinarian problem, it is a community problem," says Task Force president Ellen King Rodgers.

The problem is too large for local entities alone. The problem belongs to the whole community. The Task Force mission and model is a large volume of surgery done at one time as safely and cost effectively as possible to make as much of a "wasteland" of breeding cats and dogs as possible at one time. The mission is to involve the entire community in providing and owning the solution: people of all ages and from all organizations, business, civic and elected leaders, children's organizations, pet owners and neighbors helping to show how a community can learn and bring about change as volunteers and donors for the event. The event itself is an education, Rodgers points out. "Our goal, through demonstration and education, is see that every Wyoming dog and cat has a lifetime relationship with a Wyoming veterinarian."

Of the 200 who volunteered, there was 10 year old Betty Ann, who helped on Thursday with set up and never left until the last pet left on Sunday. Jaclyn, a volunteer from Montana, experienced in patient check-in, managed cat sign-in. "Most of the day the whole room was full of people, all saying 'This is amazing.'" "I can't believe this is happening." "I never saw so many animals being helped." Dr. Jeffrey Young from Denver who has participated with the Task Force since 1996 was especially pleased to meet Dr. Bischoff and the local veterinarians and talk about the goals of the event and hopes for the future in bringing together inexperienced pet owners and the veterinary community. All visitors and pet owners were encouraged to visit with veterinarians and observe surgery. After a visit to his surgery table from Sheridan County Commission Chairman Tom Ringley and meeting volunteer City Councilman Steve Brantz, Dr. Young reported how pleased he was at how well the event was run by Kristiansen and her team. And especially the hopes he saw for the future with leaders and the whole community so involved and committed to a program for the animals and their neighbors. Dr. Young's commitment continues. He has offered to help Dexter, a chow mix who was brought in for neutering but who also has severe skin burns causing him to limp painfully. Elaine Kristiansen is arranging transport for him to visit Young's Denver clinic for skin grafts and other repair.

Motels and private homes donated lodging for the out of towners who came with the Task Force, businesses donated meals, oxygen, and other supporting supplies. The hospital donated surgical gloves and other supplies, surgical drapes, and sterilized all the surgical instrument packs for three days, with runners "on the run" all day. Sagebrush School's Student Council raised \$300 to help buy the special cat bags that the Task Force uses to confine the cats, especially ferals, during anesthesia injections. 4H members

made up new directional signs to orient staff, volunteers and pet owners on the scene. Girl Scouts made signs with educational messages that were hung throughout the site.

But, a tired, foot sore Elaine Kristiansen recounts a favorite for her. A large dog crate arrived containing sixteen meowing cats and kittens. But only the males were to be sterilized. Spayed females might become too fat and lazy. There was some discussion and sharing of studies reported by Dr. Julie Levy, Operation Catnip at Florida State Veterinary School that show sterilized barn cats are the fittest, the healthiest and the best hunters. All sixteen cats went home sterilized, fit, healthy and “ready to hunt.” “By the way, all kittens at the event needing homes went home to responsible, permanent homes,” Elaine proudly states.

“We entered the building at approximately 10.00 a.m.,” reports one pet owner, “to find that everybody was extremely busy. After a short wait in line, our dog was checked in and we moved on to the neutering process. We found that that the process was well handled and the staff and volunteers acted in a professional manner. The process was pleasant for both our dog and ourselves.” Elaine of Sheridan and the Task Force hope that more pets and owners will experience this help in future events, organized by Elaine and a much larger team, supported by the city’s elected officials and leaders, and assisted by the Task Force.