

## **Give the dog a bone... and a home**

*By Rick Maier*

Saturdays are generally good days for the dogs and cats at the Animal Shelter. The Shelter is closed, so none of them will be put to sleep, and 12 or 15 lucky animals will find new homes at the Luv-A-Pet adoption clinic at PETsMART from 11a.m to 3p.m.

However, on Monday and every workday morning, between 15 and 20 animals will be euthanized and their bodies dumped in the landfill along the river. Why are so many cats and dogs destroyed routinely in Macon?

Some of the issues are complex. Animal advocates say vets ought to offer low-cost spaying and neutering to reduce the number of unwanted animals born. But one vet I spoke with is convinced that the kind of people who fail to spay or neuter their pets would not take their responsibility any more seriously even if the operation were free. Good point.

There is, however, one issue that everyone I spoke with agrees on: the present Macon Animal Shelter facility is obsolete and the location is horrible. The building is too small, with crowded pens and no operating room or incinerator, and the location on 11<sup>th</sup> Street between the city auto pound and the landfill cries “out of sight, out of mind.”

Years ago I casually tried to find the shelter, but didn't realize that you have to go through the landfill checkpoint to get there. On a recent Saturday I was determined to find the place. My son wanted to turn around along the way, convinced by all the abandoned factories and vacant lots that we were lost. When we finally arrived, it was closed.

I went back a few days later during the week and talked to some of the people who work there. I certainly don't envy the staff for the grim task they perform. They probably deserve medals for all they do with the little resource and attention they receive.

Relocating the Shelter is a community issue, and it's time for the citizens of Macon and Bibb County to face our responsibilities. We've invested in many wonderful public works over the last decade - museums, highways, schools, a reservoir and the start of a Greenway – and now it's time to make the relocation of the Shelter a priority.

There are some exciting initiatives under way. Macon Police Chief Rodney Monroe is taking the issue seriously, meeting with Diane Vacca of Humane Services to make improvements and explore the possibilities of relocation. City Council President Anita Ponder pushed to find \$94,000 in additional city funds for a part-time vet and other improvements.

But other major players don't appear to be engaged. How much is Bibb County investing in animal control? And where are the veterinarian and animal care industries on this issue?

The purpose for relocating the Shelter is not to continue the killing in more pleasant surroundings. It's to make conditions more humane for the animals until they find homes, and to encourage the public to get more involved in reducing the number of animals destroyed.

Imagine a large, busy facility in a convenient location where people volunteer their time to help take care of the animals, or stop by to adopt a pet, or attend a class on subjects such as pet care or preventing cruelty to animals.

Let Mayor Ellis and County Commission Chairman Olmstead know that you want a new Shelter, and soon. Let's make every day a Saturday for Shelter animals.

(Picture of Brittany and puppy)

Caption –Volunteer Brittany Warner holds pound puppy #336 at the Luv-A-Pet adoption clinic at PETsMART. See other animals available for adoption at [www.macon.petfinder.com](http://www.macon.petfinder.com).