

# bay news **letters**

**I**t's unrelenting that New Times chose to

run a "hit piece" to intentionally "slaughter" a small, volunteer animal rescue group working in the trenches that has done so much good work in this community, rather than write a public-serving, educational article that could've made a real difference in this community.

Since their article printed (published Aug. 20), HART has been banned from rescuing from the SLO County pound for the first time since 1983. The high school intern who wrote the article, took quotes out of context, and despite other information given, she purposely chose not to use it.

HART has a long history of, and has always rescued from SLO Pound and SLO County areas first and foremost. As their biggest advocate all these years, we've always been at their beck and call whenever an animal needed our help. This year, we also stepped across county lines, as others in this county do, to help those in dire straights in high-kill areas who asked for our help.

It is hypocritical for any County DAS volunteer to accuse HART of going out of county to rescue, when DAS and Woods Humane are doing the exact same thing, and have been for quite some time. It was in the Tribune a few months ago where director Eric Anderson announced that SLO County was in a position to help highkill neighboring counties in need.

Ayla Halldin, the critic in the New Times article, rode side by side with a HART volunteer on many trips to the Bakersfield pound, to rescue animals and bring them back to SLO County. (She once insisted HART take a lame puppy knowing DAS and Woods wouldn't).

A self-proclaimed animal lover, Ayla was irate because highly adoptable kittens, who were scheduled to die in the high-kill Bakersfield pound, were saved by HART. We didn't know there was a boundary line for love.

The spay/neuter laws for shelters was written and passed in 1998. Even then it stated that all shelters must spay and neuter before release, but gave options with spay/neuter deposits. To this day, many shelters are still charging S/N deposits, including SLO DAS.

On Aug. 13, I was at DAS rescuing yet another litter of kittens, when a sick kitten was being returned to DAS that had gone out on a spay deposit. Recently, our volunteer wanted to rescue a cat family from the pound, but DAS said that one of their officers was taking two of the kittens on a spay/neuter deposit.

On the DAS website under fees, it states there is a \$50 spay/neuter deposit on dogs and cats. Several other people have since verified they too, have recently removed animals from DAS on a spay/neuter deposit. None of these animals were sickly at the time, or "certified" by Dr. Anderson.

Most cats get sick at DAS. The SLO pound is the only pound who has ever given us the deadly feline "distemper" (Panleukopenia, "Parvo"), and this year was no exception. We never accept any animals straight from DAS into our shelter, they are fostered first.

In June, HART offered to help DAS volunteers when they were flooded with newborns. Critic, Ayla Halldin assured us she had her foster kittens for the required minimum two week incubation period. She did not. One week later, her three babies died at HART's expense, while I rushed to ER after midnight, at my expense. That very stressful mistake put our shelter kittens on quarantine for two weeks.

HART stepped forward again in July, when DAS was in dire straights and killing for lack of space. We agreed to take a litter for a new found foster home from Bud Tanner, a DAS volunteer and another HART critic. We asked for healthy, tame kittens, but got sickly, feral cats instead. Disagreements arose after Bud abruptly changed his mind and would not allow HART volunteers to show DAS kittens of his at a local Farmer's Market, after it was discussed initially. The more we try to help them, the more we get stung.

HART has been a shaker and a mover in this county since 1983. We played a major role in the SLO no-kill movement, which we all came so close to in 2003. Some of HART's accomplishments include; taking pictures of every animal at the County Pound twice a week and showcasing them on our (first!) web site for 4 years and faxing all their information to over 60 numbers throughout the county for more exposure. HART initiated and paid for the first vaccination program for one year for all cats at County DAS; we helped pioneer the county spay/neuter funds that are still allocated today for resident's use; we helped pioneer the annual countywide Spay Day USA; we held the county's first successful Adopt-A-Pets in Morro Bay (we "invented" the Adopt-A-Pet concept in 1983); we've rescued thousands of animals from the needle at DAS; we trapped and neutered 46 cats at Morro Bay Rock, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds behind every restaurant, hotel, motel, alleys and beaches all along the Central Coast into SLO.

I've personally knocked on many doors, and one March for Spay Day, I escorted 45 cats to the vets to be spayed/neutered. The real culprits contributing to our pet overpopulation problems are the pet stores who sell unaltered animals even without a spay deposit, the irresponsible backyard breeders who let their animals breed uncontrollably, the people who "can't afford" to S/N but go out and buy a big screen TV, the people who stand out in front of grocery stores and box chains to get rid of their unspayed litters, all the free ads on Craigs' List, all the breeder ads in the papers with no permit numbers, and the North County — especially Paso Robles, where the unspayed strays and feral cats run rampant.

*Diana Duncan is Vice President of the Homeless Animal Rescue Team (HART) in Cambria and the North Coast. The Bay News agreed to publish this article after we were told that News Times had refused to do so.*