



## THE BILL BRUCE TOUR by Janice Anderson

During the month of June, 2009, California Federation of Dogs Clubs (CFoDC), in conjunction with the National Animal Interest Alliance (NAIA), Orange Empire Kennel Club and Silver Bay Kennel Club sponsored Bill Bruce, Director of Calgary Animal Services & By-Laws (ordinances), to present his model for the most successful animal services department in North America. This, in an effort to bring viable solutions to communities within California that may be dealing with unwarranted and excessive legislation or high rates of impounds and euthanasia of dogs and cats,

"We don't have a pet problem. We have a people problem", states Bill Bruce as he begins. Owner responsibility is the mantra in Calgary. A three prong approach to responsible pet ownership incorporates licensing, public education and enforcement. Educational programs developed for school age children through adults, address responsible citizenship and responsible animal ownership. Educational programs include *PAWS: Dog Bite Prevention, Dogs in Our Society, Urban Coyotes and the Junior By-Law Project*, just to name a few. There is strong public support for the efforts of Bill Bruce by the citizens of Calgary, as they enjoy their pets in a community full of dog-friendly parks, paths and off-leash areas. They gain comfort knowing that their kinder-friendlier Animals Services Department is there to help, not harm.

Bill Bruce, as the Director of Animal Services and Bylaws in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, took over a struggling program. He has had remarkable success, developing a program which now (2008) boasts a licensing compliance rate for dogs of 91%, a return to owner rate of 85% and a euthanasia rate of only 6%. A newly implemented licensing program (2007) for cats already has a licensing compliance rate of 54%, a return to owner rate of 56% and only an 18% euthanasia rate. A majority of those animals being humanely destroyed are for behavioral issues and poor health or injuries. Aggressive animal incidents are almost non-existent. With a population base of over 1 million people, those are staggering statistics. In addition, Calgary has no limit laws, no breed specific laws, no mandatory spay/neuter ordinances and no interference from animals rights groups.

At Animal & Bylaw Services, the mission statement is to "Encourage a safe, healthy, vibrant community for people and their pets, through the development, education and compliance of bylaws that reflect community values." "They have a right to have pets and we want to ensure they're properly cared for, so we don't end up with more unwanted pets." Through the use of modern technology, a licensed animal found wandering the streets is returned directly to its home (for a small fee) whenever possible. This saves time and money for everyone. However, an unlicensed animal will be taken immediately to the shelter. Before the pet can be released to its owner, licensing requirements must be met and the owner is fined \$250. Repeat offenders face penalties that increase in \$250 increments per violation. While educating the public is essential, sometimes money is the strongest motivator. Bruce targets owners, rather than pets, saying "any animal that ends up in a shelter is there because the human end of the relationship failed." It's all part of his philosophy about animals and their owners.

This approach helps to facilitate a \$5 million annual operating budget, which is generated through license and penalty revenues, with no cost to the taxpayer. Fees generated from cat licenses have provided the community of Calgary with a state of the art facility providing no-charge spay/neuter services for pets from low-income homes. The clinic, staffed by a full-time vet, may be the final feather in Bruce's cap. "Within three to five years, we'll be a no-kill city," said chief Animal Control officer Bill Bruce. "No animal will be killed unless it's in the best interest of the animal."

With a model that is tried and true, Bill Bruce has been met everywhere he goes by enthusiastic crowds. The SoCal Tour was a whirlwind for Bill, visiting 4 counties in 5 days; San Diego, San Bernadino, Kern County and Sacramento. Bill expertly navigated through his Power Point presentation, explaining how Calgary has become known as the most successful Animal Services Department in North America. Each presentation was followed by lengthily Q&A sessions from his audiences, which included city and county officials; animals control officers, supervisors, police officers, breeders, rescue groups and the general public. Several officials had the opportunity to meet with Bill Bruce privately and discuss his successful program in detail, while he toured SoCal shelters. Citizens and officials of Kern County had a chance to meet Bill at a social prior to his presentation. The media attention was great, with television stations, print media and Inga Barks of KERN radio taking advantage of "By-law Bill's" visit to California.

The presentation in Kern County was held in conjunction with the Kern County Animal Control Commission (KCACC) meeting. The commissioners voted to move the meeting and location of their June meeting to facilitate Bruce's appearance, which was held at the County Supervisors Chambers. This meeting location offered a unique opportunity to have the presentation filmed by KGOV. KGOV will be airing the Bill Bruce presentation in July and August and has DVD's available to the public for a \$25.00 fee. KGOV may be reached at (661)868-3000 or accessed at [www.co.kern.ca.us/gsd/KGOV](http://www.co.kern.ca.us/gsd/KGOV).

Our cities, our counties and our state are being overrun with animal related legislation, much of it under the guise of "pet overpopulation". Bruce states, "We can reduce the number of animals in the shelter by reducing the number of unwanted animals being produced." It is being realized through his campaign for owner responsibility, including a bylaw with strict rules and stiff fines.

Our elected officials have been approached to endorse severe and expensive ordinances to limit pets and the rights of their owners. Much of the legislation being foisted upon us is by special interest groups from beyond the borders of California. Groups that have no stake in the effect of their actions, other than satisfying an agenda that attacks the property rights of animal owners and agriculture, forcing unwarranted expenses on our citizens, our businesses, our communities and our state.

Gracious and generous with his time, we are fortunate that Calgary is so willing to allow their very popular and successful Director to travel far and wide, sharing their program with other communities, not only in the United States, but around the world. The Calgary Model is one possible solution available to communities that can enable them to successfully run an animal control program with no cost to the taxpayer. Early reports from Kern County verify a keen interest in the Calgary model. A KCACC sub-committee has been formed to bring back recommendations to the Commission. It is our hope that other communities will follow. We do not want to waste this opportunity.