

May 5, 2006

# Cheyenne Herald

## Breaking story ...

too late for the last issue of the Herald,  
but too early to hold for the next one



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## Local group seeks to resuscitate the Animal Shelter

by Dave FEATHERLY

At an emotionally charged gathering earlier tonight (May 4th), a group of between 25-30 local residents met to discuss concerns not only over the recent euthanizing of dozens of dogs because they may have been infected with canine influenza, but because of the direction they believe the Animal Shelter has taken.

Many in attendance have direct experience at the Shelter, some with decades of involvement. One, Louise Raimondi, is a former board member, bookkeeper, and major donor toward the new shelter. Ms. Raimondi is renowned for her financial generosity to important causes in the Cheyenne community.

A representative of the United States Humane Society (USHS) was in attendance. When asked if the group had an interest in establishing a Humane Society operation in Cheyenne, she said that was probably not practical.

Most of the contacts, via e-mail and phone calls, to the Cheyenne Herald, in the past two days, have questioned the decision of the Animal Shelter Board and brand new Director to euthanize the animals so quickly. Board members defend their decision by stating that up to seven local veterinarians advised that putting all of the dogs in the Shelter down (killing them) was the right course of action.

Whether an entirely new or different Board of Directors for the Shelter would have reached the same conclusion is only conjecture.

Had the Shelter operated trouble-free over the past couple years, it is my opinion that this incident would have been viewed considerably differently by the public. But, the Shelter has painted themselves in the corner with a perceived indifference to the public's concern over how the Shelter has operated since the dismissal of longtime Shelter Director, Bill Hein. The Herald has written of specific incidents brought to our attention by residents trying to reclaim a pet or even acquire one from the Shelter. The picture has not been pretty.

*I can attest personally to what were unclean conditions in the facility. On a personal visit awhile back, the stench in the dog kennels area took my breath away. The odor was so offensive that my six year-old granddaughter immediately clasped her hand over her mouth and pinched her nostrils closed to shut out the smell. We immediately left the area.*

The group on this night discussed various problems they were aware of, the history of the Shelter, and possible avenues to pursue to change the direction the Shelter has chosen to take. Whether any or all of their solutions are possible are uncertain at this juncture.

But this is a formative group which should not be taken lightly. They have the commitment, experience, determination and financial wherewithal to push their recommendations and the tenacity to pursue trying to rectify what they consider to be major mismanagement at the Animal Shelter.

An underlying disagreement with the handling of the recent dog flu outbreak at the Shelter was the haste in which the animals were destroyed. The Humane Society had asked the Shelter to delay any action for 24 hours so they could participate in discussions of a resolution. That representative also said that while the dog flu is uncommon, it is not unheard of and that Cheyenne is the only Shelter to choose extermination over other options.

One in attendance said she had made an offer to the Shelter that she would take all of the animals and deal with their recovery. She was told, she said, to call her Congressman and push for a vaccine to treat the flu.

It is, and will continue to be, the position of the Herald that the decision of the Board was not made lightly and that neither the Board members nor staff relished the assignment of euthanizing animals some had grown to love. It is also the stand of the Herald that we will not demonize Board members nor the local vets who made the recommendation to take the action taken. Improvements need to be made at the Shelter but we will not personalize the decisions made. Neither will we stand idly or silently by while a repeat outbreak is unnecessarily allowed to remain a potential.

The introduction of dog flu to this Shelter should have been better prepared for and a plan in place to deal with it if, or when, it came. It wasn't and now the public is up in arms. Changes and corrections have to be made.