

Dog-only licensing ruled OK



HSUS / L. Brown Zurlo

Pet therapy helps the elderly

San Francisco SPCA



Two participants in San Francisco SPCA's pet therapy program share a moment. HSUS offers a list of pet therapy programs.

Los Angeles Superior Court Appellate Department judges have ruled that dog licenses can be required in a community, even though cat licenses are not. The Los Angeles Times reported that the ruling was made when a citizen convicted of a misdemeanor for failing to license his dogs appealed the conviction.

The resident claimed the license ordinance violated the equal protection clause of the US Constitution because cat owners are not also required to license their pets. He contended that the city raises about \$1.5 million from dog licensing, but spends more than a third of that controlling cats.

The judges ruled that this does not make the ordinance unconstitutional, and that classifying animals for licensing is not prohibited by the equal protection clause. The Times quotes their opinion as saying, "The remedy of the dog owner who feels that cats should also be licensed is in another arena - the legislative and executive departments of the City of Los Angeles." ■

Bringing older people together with pets benefits both in a program co-sponsored by the American Humane Education Society (AHES) and the Junior League of Boston.

For three years, the two groups have been placing pets in rest homes, adding a dimension to the residents' lives and providing good homes for the animals.

The Junior League makes the initial telephone contact with the nursing homes and meets with the administrator. If the first meeting is favorable, AHES representatives then visit the nursing home to show slides on pet ownership to the residents. They take a pet along to observe the reactions of the elderly people to an animal.

AHES Director Judith Star says it is important that "the residents and the administrators...be made aware of potential problems and natural inconvenience of owning a pet. Many people who have had little experience with animals think they are made of plastic. If the people involved in the program are not enthusiastic and well-prepared, the animal will be returned and the program will be discredited."

If the meeting is successful, AHES then selects from the Massachusetts SPCA animal shelters a medium-size short hair dog, at least two years old, housebroken and generally quiet. It is observed for a few days, then health-checked and bathed.

Then it is "adopted" by the nursing home administrator, who takes responsibility for the animal, and taken to its new home. Star observes that "most dogs can sense the frailties of older people and they instinctively become gentle with them. On the whole, this has been a most worthwhile program for everyone concerned."

For further details on starting a pet placement program, write American Humane Education Society, 350 S. Huntington Ave., Boston, MA 02130. For a list of publications on pet therapy and organizations with programs, write SHELTER SENSE, 2100 L St., NW, Washington, DC 20037. ■