

## Effect of Early Spay/Neuter on a Community

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### **1988 – The first Erie County SPCA pediatric spaying and neutering surgeries performed**

With just one veterinary hospital agreeing to take part in early age spaying and neutering, the SPCA began to sterilize puppies and kittens. Soon most area hospitals agreed to do these surgeries at an earlier age. Each hospital provided surgical services in their practice for a reduced fee. SPCA animals were sent on a two week rotation to participating veterinary hospitals. Different hospitals did not use the same protocol, some agreeing to provide surgery at two pounds but others not until three pounds. This difference in protocols meant that sometimes puppies and kittens would need to leave the shelter intact and a deposit was required at the time of adoption. It was an unacceptable amount. The average cost of surgery at this time, not including the cost of transportation vehicle and payroll, was \$38.00.

### **1994 – Off-site adoptions begin**

Overpopulation of cats and dogs is a math problem. To reduce the number of “surplus” animals, more animals must be sterilized and put into the community. Various studies show us that with cats, “distribution” of sterilized animals is hindered by supply. People will not travel more than 10-15 minutes to make a cat a member of their family and there is an abundant supply of intact cats available. In order to effect a reduction of cats in the Erie County SPCA off-site adoptions were instituted through three PETSMART stores in Erie County. The first year resulted in 600 PETSMART sterilized cat and kitten adoptions.

### **1995 – Surgical suite opens at the Erie County SPCA**

The Erie County SPCA opened its surgical suite in 1995. Local veterinarians offered to donate their time to sterilize the cats and dogs, puppies and kittens and to provide this service in agreement with the age and weight protocol of two pounds/eight weeks, of the SPCA. Over 4000 surgeries were performed the first year. The average cost of surgery was reduced to \$20.00. All animals sterilized prior to adoption.

### **1998 – Whisker Wag’n goes on the road**

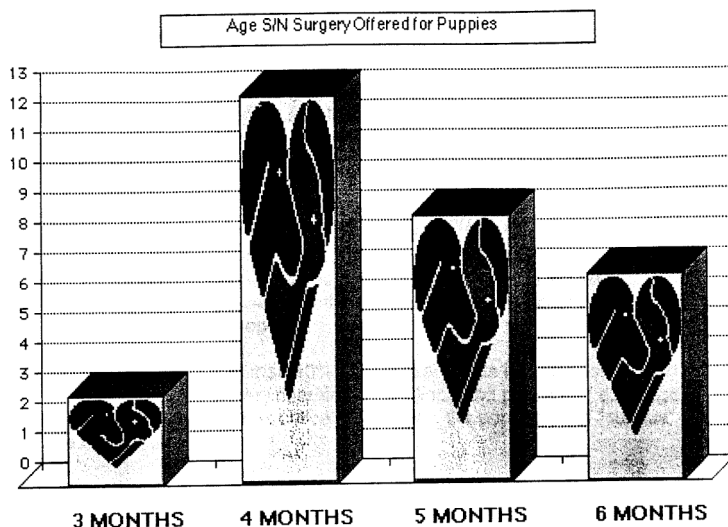
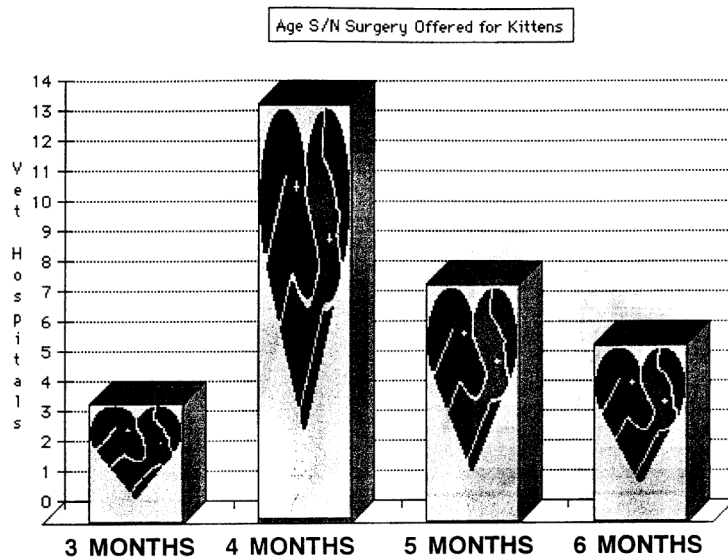
Off site adoptions worked so well that in 1998 it was decided to provide mobile adoptions to the most remote communities in the county. Named the Whisker Wag’n, the mobile adoption van is on the road 5 days a week. It runs on a regular schedule so that communities have come to expect it on “their” day. The van arrives at 3:00pm and leaves at 7:00pm providing evening hours 5 nights a week for the SPCA, further increasing adoptions.

## The Veterinary Community in Erie County

In preparation for this workshop, 33 veterinarians that volunteer at the SPCA were surveyed concerning their opinions concerning early age sterilization.

- ◆ Most veterinarians (82%) surveyed offer sterilization surgery to their clients earlier than the standard 6 months. (See chart)
- ◆ Of the veterinarians who offer early age surgery, they have been doing so for 1 to 5 years.
- ◆ 22% of those offering early age sterilization were influenced through college courses.
- ◆ 37% of those offering early age sterilization were influenced through articles in veterinary journals.

- ◆ 40% of those offering early age sterilization were influenced through experience at the Erie County SPCA.
- ◆ 37% of those offering early age sterilization were influenced through discussions with colleagues.
- ◆ 93% of those offering early age sterilization believe that recommending early age sterilization as part of routine puppy and kitten care, helps develop the educational and personal bond between clients and the veterinarian.
- ◆ 66% of those offering early age sterilization believe that offering early age sterilization helps in client retention.
- ◆ 66% of those offering early age sterilization feel comfortable recommending this to other veterinarians.
- ◆ No one surveyed believed there were any negative long-term medical or behavioral effects on the animals neutered. Some commented on good long-term effects such as fewer mammary tumors, animals recovering faster, less scaring on the animals, and reduced behavior problems.
- ◆ There appears to be clear evidence to indicate that early age sterilization at the Erie County SPCA has influenced the veterinary community to offer it in their practices.



## The Effect on the Pet Population

Cat overpopulation within Erie County is the major pet overpopulation problem occurring. For many years the Erie County SPCA received an increase in cats over the year before, while, for the most part, dogs remained flat or their numbers decreased. To address the cat problem, the Erie County SPCA began an aggressive program of adoptions through off-site, advertising and regular news spots on cooperating television stations in tandem with a policy of sterilization prior to adoption. The goal in this approach was to seed the county with sterilized animals, displace the intact cats, and to reduce births.

With the addition of the surgical suite, all kittens and cats could be sterilized. Add to this that the veterinary community in Erie County has, to a large degree, embraced early age sterilization for their own clients. While sterilization prior to adoption is incredibly important, the addition of the veterinary community's acceptance and promotion of early age sterilization to their own clientele, will become the icing on the cake to the problem of overpopulation.

Generally shelters place less than 10% of kittens and cats into homes. With 90% coming from other sources, veterinarians acceptance and practice of early age spaying and neutering becomes critical to reducing the population of "surplus" cats and dogs.

In traditional veterinary practices where sterilization surgery is not recommended until six months of age, the gap that exists between puppy and kittens vaccination schedules and the magical six months of age, creates an opportunity for clients to disregard, forget or otherwise put off the surgery. When this happens we experience mistake litters. Because almost half of "surplus" animals are a result of mistakes\*, the timing of the vaccinations and surgery can play a very important role.

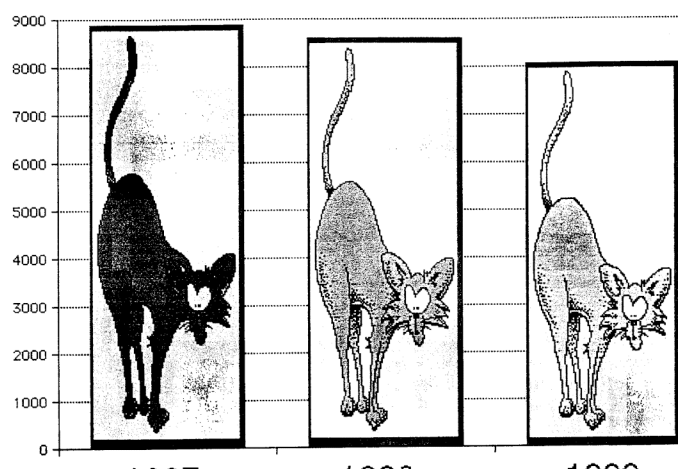
It is easy to see that if a kitten or puppy becomes six months old during December or January, owners may decide to put off this "unscheduled" surgery for a month or more in order to have more cash for holiday gift giving and activities. It can be just as easy for owners in other months to put off the yet unscheduled surgery because of personal cash flow problems, a busy schedule or simply forgetting to make the appointment. Veterinarians who provide sterilization surgery earlier, as part of a routine vaccination schedule, are more likely to meet with client compliance. The two or three month gap provided in traditional age surgery creates a window of opportunity that leaves far too much room for errors and misunderstandings to occur, possibly resulting in unwanted births of companion animals.

It is extremely important that shelters neuter all animals prior to adoption. Pediatric neutering must be available to shelter animals to fight overpopulation. Through this study, one can easily see that shelters providing early age sterilization not only affect what happens to shelter animals but could easily have an effect on community wide veterinary practices.

The following charts show how progress has been made in Erie County on the cat overpopulation problem through pediatric neutering and aggressive adoption programs.

- See Companion Animal Demographics and Sterilization Status: Results from a Survey in Four Massachusetts Towns by Ann Marie Manning and Andrew Rowan

Decrease in cat intake 1997 - 1999



# Decrease in kitten intake 1997-1999

