

Mercy, History and Hope

none

By Amanda Smith -- mandyktz@gmail.com



Independence Day is July 4th. It's the anniversary of our country's declaration of freedom. This year, it's another anniversary as well. One year ago, that same day, a dog named Mercy was euthanized at the city shelter. Someone had wanted to adopt her, but she wasn't well and the shelter staff put her down without knowing she was wanted. This caused an outcry inspired by an article published in East Texas Towns by Deloris Munden.

This seems like a tragic situation, but as is often the case, in many ways it turned out to be a blessing. It shone light on the difficult situation at the Marshall Animal Shelter: an outdated building, a small overburdened staff, lack of space, lack of funds, and not enough volunteers.

Elaine Slaughter, who had hoped to adopt Mercy, instead of being angry or bitter, proposed that we work with and support the shelter staff. She and Shelly Cullum, the shelter director, traveled to a conference to learn ways to lower kill rates. We began holding adoption events at Second Saturdays and local festivals. The Facebook page was updated. Ron Munden and I started photographing the animals and putting the photos online. A new larger sign was donated by Mayor Ed Smith, and generously installed free of charge by Gary Closkey of Closkey Construction. Adoptions have increased. Many people worked together to make good things happen, but we can only do so much with what we have.

What we have is a building that is 44 years old. The Marshall Animal Shelter was conceived and built by a small group of dedicated Marshallites led by Gloria Snyder, who in 1967 decided that Marshall needed a shelter. There was none at the time, just a fenced in area with cages where all the cats and dogs were kept together. She put an article in the paper asking for support and calling a meeting. By 1969 the shelter was built. This was an incredible accomplishment in a short amount of time. One that can serve as inspiration for us today.

Marshall's animal population has grown in ways that no one at the time could have anticipated. Our

community would benefit greatly by having a new shelter with more space. The existing building is not capable of being renovated or enlarged to meet today's needs. The memory of Mercy and the fine example set by Gloria Snyder can help to spur us forward.

The situation is complex. Currently three out of four animals that enter the shelter never make it out alive. In many cities those numbers are reversed. The solution is simple. A new building with more kennel space, a medical room where veterinarians can come in for spay/neuter clinics. A warm and inviting lobby, with an area for potential owners to meet and get to know the animals, would help get our adoption numbers up and euthanasia rates down. It will put Marshall on track with what most other cities are doing, making their community better for both animals and people. A new facility would give our dedicated shelter staff the opportunity to serve our community in ways that they cannot with our outdated facility.

A year has gone by since Mercy left this world. Let's make this year one where we move toward a better future for Marshall's people and pets. Please contact me if you are interested in being part of this effort.

asmith130703a