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By ELLY GRIMM

• Leader & Times

Animal overpopulation is a major problem in most cities, including Liberal. Liberal Animal Control recently said backyard breeding is a problem for the department and has caused a surge in the city's stray population.

One thing the animal control department stressed is that people must get their pets spayed and neutered, not just to help with population control but for other health benefits.

"The best reason is it makes them happier and healthier," said Dick Herbel, a veterinarian at Kansas Avenue Vet Clinic.

With male animals, getting neutered helps decrease aggression and makes them more socialized. It also prevents prostate disease as the animals get older. With females, getting spayed helps prevent uterus infections, cancers and if a pet gets spayed before it's 2 years old, it can also prevent mammary tumors and other health problems in later life.

At the Kansas Avenue Vet Clinic, there is a steady rotation of animals coming in for the procedure. The costs for the procedure vary with each animal depending on factors like size, age and health status. Herbel said he gets many reasons for people coming in to get the procedure done for their pets.

“They don’t want to go through heat cycles, they don’t have to do that anymore – that’s kind of a mess it lasts three weeks so that’s not very fun,” he said. “They also don’t want to have to worry about repeated heat cycles or they don’t want to worry about unwanted pregnancies and litters of puppies or kittens so it does decrease all that, which is good.”

Herbel said he recommends for people to get their pets fixed between six and nine months of age. After the procedure, the pets are usually sleepy for about one or two days and after two days roughly 80 percent normal and then they need to rest for about two weeks. After two weeks the stitches are removed and then are done.

Brett Jones, a veterinarian with Liberal Animal Hospital, says the most common reason he hears for why people haven’t yet gotten their pets fixed is because they want at least one puppy or kitten just like their pet.

“They say they want their pets to go through one litter first. I tell them that’s a huge challenge because it’s just like brothers and sisters – you can’t guarantee you’ll get one just like your pet,” Jones said.

Jones also said he believes that the procedure should be done by the vet who has a relationship with the pet as opposed to someone working at one of the many low cost spay and neuter clinics.

“I think this is a bad idea because I think it should be done by someone who has a relationship with your pet and the problem is they do it as fast as they can so the workmanship might not be so good,” he explained. “Myself and Dr. Herbel have seen those where the pets have multiple problems but that surgeon is already long gone.”

Both Herbel and Jones say their clinics see a steady stream of people wanting their pets to be spayed and neutered throughout the year and recommend regular checkups for pets to keep them happy and healthy.

“Good food, good water and housing and grooming, those types of things to keep your pet happy and healthy. The best thing is regular checkups, which is sometimes hard to do – people come in and go ‘oh my gosh, it’s already been two or three years,’ which we see almost every day,” Herbel said. “But we try to get everything going and as they age they have different requirements and needs.”

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