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Only eight of 209 dogs admitted to Riverhead’s animal shelter were put down in 2010; but who should get the credit?

By [Michael White](#) | April 7, 2011 in [Featured Stories](#), [Uncategorized](#)

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BARBARAELEN KOCH PHOTO | Reko, a 5-year-old male American Staffordshire Terrier, has been at the Riverhead Town Animal Control shelter since Dec. 30.

Riverhead's animal shelter, which in recent months has come under heavy fire from animal rights activists, euthanized the fewest dogs last year, percentage wise, of all taxpayer-funded shelters in neighboring towns, according to data provided to the News-Review from four different shelters.

The publicly funded shelter and animal control facility on Youngs Avenue, overseen by the Riverhead Police Department, put down eight of 209 dogs admitted there in 2010, which computes to a 3.83 percent "kill rate."

That rate is lower than the 5.5 percent reported by the privately run North Fork Animal Welfare League shelter in Southold, which is partially funded by the town; the 4 percent at the Southampton Animal Shelter, a hybrid of town-paid animal control and nonprofit adoption and sheltering efforts; and the 11.1 percent at the Brookhaven Animal Shelter, though the shelter director there noted the town put down a large number of dogs — 127 in 2010 — signed over by their owners for euthanasia services, usually because the owners could not afford the procedure.

Not including those 127 dogs, Brookhaven put down 52 of 1,607 admitted dogs deemed unadoptable because of aggression or health reasons, which computes to a 3.2 percent rate. However the other shelters, while not taking dogs specifically for euthanasia, will accept severely aged or sick dogs that are usually put down, though those numbers weren't readily available from all the shelters.

The euthanasia findings came as welcome news to Riverhead Town officials and animal welfare advocates, groups that have fought bitterly for years, even decades, over shelter operations.

But they couldn't agree on where the credit should lie.

"We do a good job," Police Chief David Hegermiller said in response to the figures. "For what we have [in our budget], we do a great job."

Chief Hegermiller said that even one euthanized dog would be too much for some animal welfare activists.

Glen Cove resident and activist Gail Waller, who says she has personally paid for vet bills and other assistance to help save Riverhead shelter dogs — though she was not sure if she had done so in 2010 — called the numbers "skewed."

"There are dogs that have been saved through me or RSVP [Responsible Solutions for Valued Pets Inc.] that would have otherwise been killed for medical reasons or for what [the town] deemed aggression," Ms. Waller said. "And the numbers don't account for any dogs sent to Kent Animal Shelter."

Chief Hegermiller readily acknowledged the town gets help in adopting out dogs.

"There have been some groups and individuals who have helped spread the word," he said, though he declined to give the RSVP group credit.

"You have two different mind-sets, two different goals," the chief said of the frequently warring sides. "I'm not faulting their goals. But we're a municipality and we do the best we can. Some of their goals are not to euthanize any animals — no matter what they may say publicly — and as a municipality it can't be that way. There are some dogs that, sad to say, have to be euthanized."

Riverhead Supervisor Sean Walter speculated that the positive 2010 numbers could have come in spite of RSVP, a nonprofit animal rescue organization that was started by Riverhead shelter volunteers in 1996 but currently has only two members placed there.

"Our problem is that our not-for-profit group, RSVP, spends more time lambasting the town than they do working with the animals," he said. "Those [kill rate] numbers are amazing considering how these people are consistently out there beating the tar out of us, so that's a good thing."

RSVP member Sue Hansen of Rocky Point insisted the kill figures could be traced to a 2005 Town Board resolution that demanded the then-banned shelter volunteers be allowed back on the shelter premises, as well as another measure that created an animal advisory committee to offer recommendations on euthanasia and other policies.

"What's happening is that they're being watched very closely now," she said of the town authorities. "They're being scrutinized."

"What you really should look at is the statistics in 2004 and 2005, when we formed the animal committee, which Councilman Jim Wooten is now the liaison to," said Rex Farr, a Calverton farmer and outspoken critic of the town's animal control officer, Lou Coronese, who handles day-to-day shelter operations.

The 2004 and 2005 figures were not immediately available.

"Once 2005 came and the committee stepped in, they set up procedures such as checking with vets and

animal behaviorists that could actually give an educated opinion as to whether a dog was aggressive or non-aggressive or had a medical problems,” Mr. Farr said. “But the bottom line is, it’s not just the euthanasia that is the problem. The problem is the running of the shelter by Lou Coronesi. I’m not saying he should be fired from the town. All we’re saying is he should be removed from the animals.”

The activists have repeatedly called for Mr. Coronesi to leave his post as animal control officer, claiming he alienates volunteers who want to help. They also point to his criminal convictions dating to 2003 in Arizona — where Mr. Coronesi was arrested on charges that he unlawfully hunted and possessed wild animals, including a Gila monster lizard and a rattlesnake — as reasons he should not be near shelter dogs.

The long-simmering feud came to a boil in December after a male pit bull named Bruno was euthanized over the protests of volunteers who contended he wasn’t dangerous. Mr. Coronesi told the supervisor the dog had attacked a child, according to Mr. Walter. But it was later revealed through a bite report that the victim was a 22-year-old man.

But the supervisor says the transfer of animal control officer Sean McCabe to another department because of budget cuts was at the heart of this winter’s sharp assault on the town and police department.

“They liked this person and didn’t like the other person,” Mr. Walter said. “It’s really a battle of personalities.”

“Lou is more by the book, which I don’t think they like,” Chief Hegermiller said, indicating Mr. Coronesi pushes the volunteers to abide more closely to shelter rules, which results in disputes.

Mr. Wooten, who as the Town Board liaison to the animal committee has frequently sided with the animal activists, has for about two years been pushing to privatize the shelter, but those efforts have so far failed.

He is now calling on the town to hire a shelter director and rearrange the staff. That would include transferring or minimizing Mr. Coronesi’s role.

“We don’t have the right management,” he said. “You’ve got an animal control officer who runs the shelter, which is like putting a police officer in charge of rehab. Riverhead’s outreach is not that good. We need a director who will work with the nonprofits regularly. We actually shun our volunteers.”

He also said the same activists despised by town officials deserve much credit for the euthanasia rates.

“[The animal advisory committee] will reach out to RSVP and we’ll tell them straight-up, ‘This dog is slated to be euthanized; you gotta get this dog out of here,’” Mr. Wooten said.

Mr. Walter had pitched an idea to share services with Brookhaven Town but those talks are now on hold as that town considers building an entirely new shelter.

Ms. Waller of Glen Cove and other animal rights activists interviewed insist a fundamental problem with almost all municipal shelters is that animal control officers are often not qualified to train or socialize animals or assess health and behavior. (Towns are mandated by the state to fund animal control efforts.)

So a change in state laws may be required to solve recurring problems.

“What qualifications are required for a person to be an animal control officer?” Ms. Waller asked. “They take a civil service test, and all most of them know is how to work with animals the old way, when the new way is you rehabilitate them.

“Anybody working in animal control should be there for the protection of the public and also the protection of the dogs,” she continued. “They should be qualified to rehabilitate them. Or not be afraid to at least try.”

Robert Misseri is one of the founding members and a former president of Rescue Ink, a Long Beach-based group of tattoo and muscle-clad animal rescuers whose exploits are featured on the National Geographic Series series Rescue Ink Unleashed. He now runs a Long Island-based national group called Guardians of Rescue.

Mr. Misseri said he is familiar with the issues at the Riverhead shelter. He agreed with Chief Hegermiller’s take that the animal control officers and the activists would likely never see eye to eye, even though the warring sides have combined for some decent adoption rates.

“I think at the end of the day, both sides will never agree. So both sides need to find a happy medium and work hand in hand for the animals,” Mr. Misseri said. “The ideal situation is for a private group to operate the shelter. That’s sometimes difficult because of union issues. But the advantage is a private group can go out and raise money through charitable events. Chief Hegermiller’s not going to go out and do fundraisers.”

[TOWN SHELTERS BY THE NUMBERS](#)

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Guest 2 weeks ago

Rescue organizations and individuals are the ones who save these animals. Animal Control does nothing but sit back and let them do the work, pay the vet bills, and help severely ill animals. Wake up people. Animal Control system does not VET or Shelter animals. They are a killing facility, plain and simple. Without intervention by this brave courageous animal advocacy group, the kill rate would be so high it would be unthinkable. Without private animal groups/rescue organizations, a.c. would kill 24/7. Citizens do you want a shelter or a killing facility. See to the funding if you care.

3 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



4areason 2 weeks ago [in reply to Guest](#)

Nice 'seasoned politician' spin Mr Walters....kick to the curb the very people that gave you the reason to make your administration look good, saving animals in your shelter.....No,those numbers could NOT have been that high "in spite of RSVP"....Hopefully the voters will see through this transparency.

2 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



Teak12 2 weeks ago

The only reason Riverhead shelter has such a low euthanization rate is because of the tireless effort put forth by RSVP VOLUNTEERS. Not only do we prevent dogs from entering their shelter,we also take the dogs usually at their request out of their shelter under the threat of euthanization to rehabilitate and adopt them out. As usual the politicians take the bows for work they haven,t done. Its time to recognize the people who make a difference.

2 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



Gillianwp 2 weeks ago

Because the headline and the table attached to this article both focus on statistics, I would like to correct Mr. White's figures on the operating costs of Southold Animal Shelter.

The TOTAL BUDGET COSTS FOR 2010 was \$376,780.06 (not \$560,000). The Town of Southold taxpayer's expenditure was \$189,798.00, North Fork Animal Welfare League contributed \$186,982.06.

The League took in a total of 364 animals in 2010. This is a cost per animal of \$1,035.00, with the taxpayer contribution being \$521.42 per animal. Gillian Wood Pultz, Executive Director, NFAWL

2 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)



Michael White 2 weeks ago [in reply to Gillianwp](#)

Hi Gillian,

Here's how I reached the Southold shelter costs...

Based on our conversation, you said the foundation chips in about what the town does, which you indicated to me to be about \$200,000. In 2010 the town funded \$189,000 as per the contract. The town also told me, however, that that figure does not include utilities and maintenance on the town-owned building, estimated to cost \$30,000 annually. (though I did not receive an itemized list.)

The town also pays, at present time, \$143,000 on debt service for the new building, I was told by the supervisor.

I added $\$200,000 + \$189,000 + \$143,000 + \$30,000 = \$562,000$

I then rounded down to \$560,00.

Mike

1 person liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

 **Ace Grumman** 2 weeks ago [in reply to Michael White](#)

Debt service is not an operating expense, per accounting standards. Accounting 101, Google it up!
A town's decision to invest capital in a new building would have to be paid for regardless of whether they turned the shelter structure to some other use, such as a new office for town board staff. When you compare operating costs to other shelters, make sure you are not comparing apples to oranges. The town pays the supervisor a salary, too, and that is not an operating expense for the shelter, either.

3 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

 **About_the_TRUTH** 2 weeks ago [in reply to Ace Grumman](#)

There you go again. That is only half, Ace, of the story.

Unit operating costs are the issue. Take the operating costs--personnel costs, food, vet bills, utilities, maintainance, travel, etc. plus depreciation and divide that total by the number of animal-days (i.e. the sum of the number of days each animal spends in the shelter) to arrive at the cost per animal per day. Now we can do oranges to oranges instead of oranges to kumquats.

So if shelter A decides to run a good shelter--good grooming, proper training, successful advertising, good and fast adoptions-- animals stay briefly . If shelter B chooses to run a hospice/assisted-living facility the animals stay forever. How will the costs compare?

If the fixed costs (buildings, personnel, utilities, depreciation. etc.) are higher than the variable costs (food, vet bills, etc.), then Shelter A will cost more per animal day, but the throughput--animals passing through per year will be higher.

Ain't that easy to say what is better is it? Unless, of course you know more about the problem and the community intent.

1 person liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

 **Ace Grumman** 2 weeks ago [in reply to About the TRUTH](#)

Hi Gunther!
Well, here is an easy link to show even an ex-professor of social work, or whatever, that debt service is not an operating expense. You see, in the real world, it either is or it isn't.
<http://www.answers.com/topic/o...>
See, I know that facts can interfere with what looks like your in-a-box logic. Unfortunately for you, this is the accounting standard, not some make-believe nonsense you have conjured up. BTW, dogs are not units to people who care, which you obviously do not. There is no need for readers to follow your formula whereby units = dogs. Maybe the town will want to work out of a pup tent to limit depreciation? Kill the dog units after one day to speed throughput? You need to stop sniffing the Zyklon-B, my friend.

3 people liked this. [Like](#) [Reply](#)

 **About_the_TRUTH** 1 week ago [in reply to Ace Grumman](#)

So Ace is now Joe the Accountant.

Let's play a round of pick the web site.

"In business, an operating expense is a day-to-day expense such as sales and administration, or research &

development, as opposed to production, costs, and pricing. In short, this is the money the business spends in order to turn inventory into throughput. Operating expenses also include depreciation of plants and machinery which are used in the production process."

from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/O..>

The same ideas apply to not-for-profit organizations engaged in providing or producing services.

Who is Gunther?

Like Reply



Ace Grumman 1 week ago [in reply to About the TRUTH](#)

And you must be Alan Greenscam. The item the reporter was mis-informed about was debt servicing not being an operating expense.
Can you guess why depreciation does not apply to a service contract in a non-production setting? Maybe you can ask your boss? Once you figure out which planet you live on.

Like Reply



Benja 2 weeks ago

Euthanasia rates and operating costs may be NEWS but they can also be misleading. Euthanasia rates may depend on factors shelter operators can not control. Animal shelters offer vastly different services. Comparing costs without comparing services is misleading.

The real story here is how Humane Animal Sheltering is Achieving Popular Recognition. The quotes in the last paragraph of this article reflect how animal sheltering is leading the way towards more effective and economical local government by working with local not-for-profit organizations.

1 person liked this. Like Reply



Guest 1 week ago

No where in this article or the attachment does anyone mention 'operating costs.'

Like Reply



Ace Grumman 1 week ago [in reply to Guest](#)

See first sentence of Gillianwp's letter above for the term "operating expense". Then the columnist, Michael White, answers in the next letter that the Southold supervisor told him he pays \$143,000 for debt service on financing for the building. Debt service is not an operating expense, period.

Like Reply



Guest 1 week ago [in reply to Ace Grumman](#)

It looks like the commenter used the phrase operating cost, not the columnist.

Like Reply



Michael Edelson 1 week ago

"Lou (Coronesi) is more by the book", according to Riverhead Police Chief David Hegermiller. If this top cop considers Lou providing inaccurate information about a serious matter as a dog bite, then I hate to think how "by the book" the Riverhead police function.

Like Reply



Triumph 2 weeks ago

Oh, thank God..Bruno didnt bite a child, just a 22-year old! Well, that means the adorable doggie shouldn't be euthanized? You animal rights folks are NUTS...with a capital "NUTS"!

Like Reply





Whatsright 2 weeks ago

Great Photo

Like Reply

Reactions



kellymartin745 2 weeks ago

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veramatilde 2 weeks ago

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PetsLately 2 weeks ago

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popups_cockups 2 weeks ago

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RT @nannersmom: Only eight of 209 dogs admitted to Riverhead's animal shelter were put down <http://bit.ly/eCTGqv>



nannersmom 2 weeks ago

From [Twitter](#)

Only eight of 209 dogs admitted to Riverhead's animal shelter were put down <http://bit.ly/eCTGqy>



mikewhite31 2 weeks ago

From [Twitter](#)

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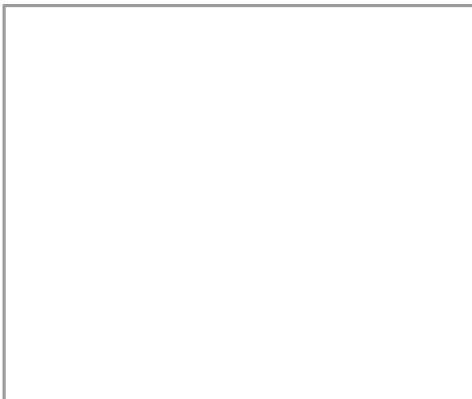
JakethePoundDog 2 weeks ago

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