

Casa Lupita Helps Foster Pet-Owner Culture

By Tim Rogers

Nica Times Staff

When the Casa Lupita animal clinic first opened its doors in 2006, founder Donna Tabor used to have to drive around Granada in her pickup truck "recruiting" street dogs for spaying, neutering and other veterinary services.

Now, when the volunteer clinic opens its doors at 8 a.m., there's already a line formed outside of people carrying all sizes and shapes of dogs and cats seeking free care for their pets.

The increased interest in the services provided by Casa Lupita is a testament to a



Got Milk? Volunteers at Granada's Casa Lupita bottle-feed an abandoned newborn kitten. Top right, Lucky the abused dog gets some love. Below, Rudy and William Hernández, 13 and 10, bring their dog Blanca in for some care.



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growing culture of pet ownership here, says head U.S. veterinarian Tom Parker, who has made more than 20 trips to Nicaragua over the past three years.

"When people bring their animals in for care it helps them shift gears into better pet owners," Parker said. "This is the real impact that the clinic has had. People have a little more invested in their pets, and they are taking better care of them."

Due to the high costs of running a volunteer animal clinic —upwards of \$12,000 per week — Casa Lupita is dependent on volunteers and donations, and is not open year round. But when volunteer vet teams are in town, they work tirelessly to see as many animals as possible.

Last week, a group of 11 vets and vet technicians from U.S. volunteer organization World Vets performed 136 spays and neuters, and de-wormed 110 dogs. The group also helped rescue several abused and abandoned animals, including a young street dog named "Lucky," who looks like her first year of life has been anything but.

Overall, the clinic staff estimates that around 80 percent of the animals that get brought in are pets, while about 20 percent are strays or abandoned animals. The clinic has also helped correct several botched surgeries performed by one notorious Granada

veterinarian.

While Parker admits it would be a bit "naïve" to assume that Casa Lupita's work has made a significant impact on the street dog population in Granada, in more controlled environments the vet team has made notable progress.

In the past two years, Parker has led two volunteer missions to Little Corn Island, which is essentially a closed ecosystem for beach dogs, and performed almost 250 spays and neuters. As a result, island residents claim they have noticed a real impact on the animal population, and Parker has noted a real change in people's attitudes toward their pets.

"People are taking better care of their animals; they are taking their dogs for walks and brushing their hair," he said.

In the long term, Casa Lupita hopes to have a similar impact in Granada. To do so, Parker is working to train Nicaraguan veterinarians to manage the clinic on a more regular operating schedule in between visits from the U.S. volunteers, who come four to six times a year.

Once the Nicaraguan veterinarians are fully trained, and additional funding is secured to compensate them for their work, Parker hopes Casa Lupita will be able to attend animals one day a week.

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