

## **SPCA gives more than aid to animals in Polk County**

**By Lenore Devore / The Ledger**

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MBA Director Charles DuVal and four students working toward their master's in business administration at Florida Southern College delivered the first-of-its-kind study to SPCA Florida Director Adam Stanfield, who shared the report that he considers critical to moving his organization forward.

The students input SPCA-provided data from 2010 through 2015 into a sophisticated software program to look at the effects an animal welfare organization has on the economy. The results show SPCA Florida, which has an annual budget of approximately \$6 million, contributed \$71.4 million to the regional economy for those six years. The study breaks down impact in three key areas:

- The organization's adoption center generated almost \$26 million to Polk County industries during the six-year span.
- The adoption center also generated slightly more than \$8.5 million to industries outside Polk County.
- Its Reva McClurg Animal Medical Center generated almost \$37 million to the county economy.
- Together, the three scenarios above contributed about \$2.4 million in state and local taxes.
- Through adoptions, the SPCA's economic impact has provided for one extra employee for each of the county's 179 veterinarians.
- Its medical center generated unspecified revenue to help offset losses in other areas. It also provides \$10,000 to \$15,000 in free care a month.

"The study concludes SPCA Florida serves a critical role in Polk County and the surrounding region, not only by creating economic value through the area, but also by keeping animal populations down through spay/neuter programs, helping to feed pets through nutritional assistance programs and rescuing needy animals," the study says.

It also reports that the county's Animal Control Services would receive about 10,000 more cats and 9,000 more dogs a year, nearly doubling what it handles now, if the adoption center was not here.

Stanfield said he wants to shift the organization's "energy toward outreach efforts and building stronger ties within the community" and this report, along with a recent rebranding campaign, was part of that effort.

At the Atlanta hospital where Stanfield worked before starting at the SPCA, the chief operating officer always talked about that hospital's economic impact on the community, he said. "That always stuck with me."

Then, while visiting a veterinarian in Winter Haven, the path forward became clear, he said.

“In the waiting room there was a woman who said she got four cats from us,” Stanfield said. “That’s when the light bulb went on to tie things together. We are essentially the supply chain for the for-profit vet community.”

After checking local statistics, he found that 25 percent of pets adopted at the SPCA shelter last year are taken to the SPCA medical center for treatment, another 25 percent are taken to out-of-county vets and the last 50 percent are taken to local vets for care. Last year, the organization found homes for 3,672 pets, including 2,940 that stayed in the county. Another 430 were adopted by families in Hillsborough County.

“There is value associated with that. We are essentially providing a fairly decent size customer base for the for-profit industry,” Stanfield said. “That allows local vets to grow their businesses and hire new people, who then secure goods and services from other companies.”

That part of the economic input study showed the SPCA presents a 1.67 multiplier effect on its revenue, meaning every dollar spent generates \$1.67 elsewhere.

“Every dollar that is given to us in donations and services ... we are giving back almost double that (1.67 multiplier) — 67 percent — on top of helping animals in our community,” said SPCA board of directors’ President Julie Davis, a certified public accountant at Baylis & Company. “That shows we are a community partner.”

Davis said she was surprised at the impact the SPCA has not only in Polk County but in the surrounding counties, as well.

“It was astounding, from job creation to taxes created,” she said. “I was going down the list and I was just awestruck reading it.”

She also said she thinks the report will help the SPCA when it applies for grants and public funding because it proves it generates enough money to create jobs elsewhere.

“Going into this political season, everyone is talking about job creation and the economy as a whole. This shows that by helping the SPCA, you are helping the economy grow,” Davis said.

The SPCA is looking to hire its ninth vet, a person who will work in the animal shelter, Stanfield said. It's also using donor gifts to build an isolation area for canines, set to open next year. That will expand the number of dogs it can treat, much like occurred when it opened a feline isolation area last year.

Last year, the SPCA euthanized 139 animals, all for temperament or health problems. The organization does not euthanize for space reasons, Stanfield said.

Dr. Donna McWilliams, a veterinarian and owner of My Pet's Animal Hospital, said, "Overall, the SPCA certainly appears to be a positive contributor in the community." And she fully supports programs like the one that offers food assistance.

She also said, "The shelter certainly appears to generate positive revenue for local vets if they are accepting pets as patients from the SPCA."

She said she thinks the community would benefit even more from the McClurg Animal Medical Center if it used a sliding scale based upon clients' income. This would allow patients to receive care who otherwise wouldn't be able to afford it. Currently, costs at the McClurg center are comparable to other local vets, with some being higher and some being lower, she said.

### **Intriguing information found**

Love for animals and support for the SPCA is one reason two Florida Southern students volunteered quickly to help on this project, said MBA director DuVal. Others joined because of the unique challenge doing such an economic impact study posed, the incredible learning experience it provided and the chance to give back to the community, he said.

The group found arts and entertainment impact studies for non-profit organizations, "but never anything like this (for animal welfare organizations)," he said. "I found it to be particularly intriguing."

Once they decided to tackle the request, at no charge to the SPCA, they found government agencies have been using IMPLAN software for decades, DuVal said.

SPCA officials opened their books for the four students during the summer, providing data that had never been assimilated and finding information that had never been sought before, like where animals go by ZIP code, he said.

“We would not have guessed 20 (percent) to 25 percent of the animals leave Polk County,” he said.

The process the students used might be replicated. Two of the students are examining starting a consulting company to do such research for nonprofits across the country, DuVal said.

“It’s a niche in the academic community that has never been filled,” he said. “If we can add value to non-profits throughout the country, that would be incredible. The fact that this can be of such value to the SPCA now is such a great thing.”

DuVal said they’ve asked several non-profits how much they would pay for such a study, and the answers ranged from \$5,000 to \$20,000.

“It means so much for every stakeholder to have this information,” he said.

Davis, who audits nonprofits, agreed the study is “groundbreaking.”

“I think what Florida Southern College created for the SPCA will allow not only the SPCA to go out and show impact, but allow other organizations to go out and fundraise as well,” she said.

Stanfield said he plans to use the information to show “SPCA Florida can arguably be viewed as a catalyst or economic engine that perpetuates the growth and development of our business community by being a supply or life line to our veterinarian community and other welfare organizations.”

There is benefit in partnering, he said. “Now is the time for us, SPCA Florida, to take the proper seat at the table and be able to influence development of our industry as well as be recognized as the strong supporter that we are.”

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