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Press Release

To: Area Media
From: Newberry County and Pawmetto Lifeline
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Council and Pawmetto Lifeline Join Forces to Reduce Unwanted Animal Population in Newberry County

Newberry, SC -- On Wednesday evening, Newberry County Council approved a contract with a Midlands non-profit organization, Pawmetto Lifeline, to provide low cost spay-neuter services for Newberry County pet owners. Newberry County is seeking to reduce the intake of unwanted pet and feral animals at its animal shelter. Pawmetto Lifeline's participation will be part of a regional effort by the organization to raise awareness about, and provide solutions to, animal overpopulation.

Nationally, the Humane Society of the United States estimates that 6-8 million animals enter shelters each year, and that between one-half and two-thirds of those animals are euthanized. In late October, animal services director Leslie Jenkins asked for council's support in reducing the number of unwanted pet and feral animals in Newberry County by providing the low cost sterilization surgeries. She reported then that animal intake over the prior 12 months had reached the 2,500 mark, and that approximately 70% of animals entering the shelter were being euthanized.

"It's not possible to address the overpopulation of dogs and cats, and to reduce the number of animals euthanized at shelters, without making spay-neuter financially accessible to more pet owners," said Jenkins. "Otherwise, animal reproduction will continue to exceed by far the demand for adoption animals, as well as the ability of taxpayers to build and staff bigger and bigger shelters."

In conjunction with the council-approved spay-neuter services contract, animal sterilization surgeries will be made widely available to Newberry County pet owners for just \$30. At that rate, the County will be subsidizing the surgeries by an estimated \$12-15 each, in order to keep the price point low and encourage participation. Additionally, the service will be available at no charge to those who demonstrate limited financial means or show proof of unemployment. Participating animal owners must show proof of their pets' rabies vaccinations or pay an additional \$10 for the vaccination to be administered at the time of surgery. Payment of all charges is required in advance of the surgery date.

Pawmetto Lifeline, the County's partner in the venture, is a Columbia-based non-profit group that, among other things, encourages the responsible management of pet populations in the towns and counties that surround their headquarters. They actively cooperate with Richland and Lexington counties to fulfill these objectives. The organization is currently finishing construction of a new spay-neuter clinic in Columbia's Harbison area. Organization representatives are touting the new facility as a regional hub for affordable high-quality, high-volume animal sterilization services. Until the facility is opened in early February, the County will be administering its spay-neuter initiative through local veterinary clinics, but on a space-available basis. By April, Palmetto Lifeline will be both sterilizing as many as 30 Newberry County animals per week and transporting them to and from Columbia.

"The campaign Newberry County is launching can be a model for local governments in dealing with animal overpopulation," Pawmetto Lifeline medical services director Tracy Johnson commented. "We envision that numerous jurisdictions will join with Pawmetto Lifeline under similar arrangements in what will be a fundamental shift in the public sector's perspective on this issue."

Newberry County's near-term goal is for animal adoptions and sterilizations to exceed the number of animals euthanized at its facility. "We simply want positive outcomes, such as sterilizations and adoptions, to be the primary focus of the County's animal services operations," said county administrator Wayne Adams.

First year targets call for the spaying and neutering of 1,500 animals, and for the adoption of an additional 500. Interested pet owners may contact Newberry County Animal Services by telephone between 10:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. at 321-2185, or through the County's web site, www.newberrycounty.net, anytime.