

## Department of Agricultural Resources Kicks Off Massachusetts Animal Fund Spay/Neuter Voucher Program



DAR Commissioner Greg Watson, Dr. David Dunn of North Shore Animal Hospital, Animal Rescue League of Boston Vice President Dr. Martha Smith-Blackmore, Massachusetts Animal Fund Coordinator Lauren Gilfeather and two of the Hospital's patients (Photo Credit: Amy Mahler)

LYNN – Wednesday, September 10, 2014 – Department of Agricultural Resources (DAR) Commissioner Greg Watson yesterday kicked off the Massachusetts Animal Fund's Spay/Neuter Program at the North Shore Animal Hospital. The Program offers free spay/neuter surgery and rabies vaccinations to homeless dogs and cats, as well as dogs and cats owned by low-income families in Massachusetts. North Shore Animal Hospital was the first veterinary practice to sign up as a Spay/Neuter provider.

"We are extremely fortunate to have such an active community of animal advocates in Massachusetts. While there are many dogs and cats across the Commonwealth in loving homes, there are many who live in unsafe conditions on their own," said Commissioner Watson. "The Spay/Neuter Program is an important part in improving the lives of these animals and making our communities safer."

The Massachusetts Animal Fund has partnered with municipal animal control officers to identify the state's most vulnerable animals, and veterinary practices that are committed to providing surgery and vaccination at a reduced rate. Animal homelessness poses a public safety concern and costs taxpayers money for services dealing with stray, abandoned and feral animals and their offspring.

"We are only as successful as the partnerships we make, and we are fortunate to have

an excellent model on the North Shore,” said Lauren Gilfeather, Coordinator of the Massachusetts Animal Fund. “We have an enthusiastic provider, North Shore Animal Hospital, who is willing to perform sterilization at our reimbursement rate; proactive animal control officers who are excited about what our program will mean for the animals in their communities; feeders and trappers who have dedicated themselves to caring for feral cat colonies; and local rescue groups and shelters that find forever homes for dogs and cats that are helped through our program. Above all else, all of these people share our goal to invest in the responsible care of animals and end animal homelessness in Massachusetts.”

Since 2013, the Massachusetts Animal Fund has raised \$434,000 solely through a voluntary tax check-off on Line 32f of the Massachusetts resident income tax form to help with their efforts end animal homelessness in the Commonwealth. Residents are now able to make direct online donations at <https://www.paybill.com/massanimalfund>. DAR and the Massachusetts Animal Fund encourage residents of the Commonwealth to invest in the responsible care of animals.

North Shore Animal Hospital was the first veterinary practice to sign up as a Spay/Neuter provider. They are also one of the first recipients of a voucher, which will be used on a small, male, mixed-breed stray dog who was found in Chelsea, brought to their shelter on June 4, and will be available for adoption after the procedure.

“Until now, shelters have had no regular guaranteed source of funding for stray animals and must rely on donations and support from local veterinarians,” said Lauren Lacey of North Shore Animal Hospital. “The Massachusetts Animal Fund Spay/Neuter Voucher Program will allow people to provide their pets with needed veterinary care. This assistance program will help so many animals have happy and healthy lives.”

“It is fantastic that the taxpayers of Massachusetts, who voluntarily choose to donate to this fund by checking the box at line 32f on their state tax return, have given a mechanism that makes it easy for every private practice veterinarian and local animal hospital to join the fight.” said Dr. Martha Smith-Blackmore, Vice President of the Animal Rescue League of Boston. “Now all veterinarians can play an increased role in preventing the relinquishment of unwanted animals in shelters and play an increased role in the prevention of relinquishment of animals with unwanted behaviors to animal shelters.”

Residents with demonstrated financial need interested in receiving a no-cost voucher from the Spay/Neuter Voucher Program should contact their municipal animal control officer to request assistance. Municipal animal control facilities interested in receiving a no-cost voucher for a homeless animal in their care should contact Lauren Gilfeather at [lauren.gilfeather@state.ma.us](mailto:lauren.gilfeather@state.ma.us).

The Massachusetts Animal Fund, administered by [DAR](#) with assistance from an [advisory committee](#), was established by [Chapter 193 of the Acts of 2012](#) to respond to the problem of animal homelessness. Residents can make direct online donations at <https://www.paybill.com/massanimalfund>.

DAR’s mission is to ensure the long-term viability of agriculture in Massachusetts. Through its four divisions – Agricultural Conservation & Technical Assistance, Agricultural Markets, Animal Health, and Crop and Pest Services – DAR strives to support, regulate and enhance the rich diversity of the Commonwealth’s agricultural community to promote economically and environmentally sound food safety and animal health measures, and

fulfill agriculture's role in energy conservation and production. For more information, visit DAR's website at [www.mass.gov/agr](http://www.mass.gov/agr), and/or follow at [twitter.com/mdarcommish](https://twitter.com/mdarcommish).