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Outgoing Dallas Animal Services Director Ed Jamison on Friday with Benson, one of the shelter dogs that is looking for a permanent home. Jamison will begin his job as CEO at Operation Kindness March 29. (Elias Valverde II)



By [Sharon Grigsby](#)

7:54 AM on Mar 15, 2021 CDT



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If ever I wanted to disregard a Facebook post as fake news, it was the one I stumbled across a few days ago and still can't quite believe: After only 3½ years, Dallas Animal Services director Ed Jamison is leaving his job.

This is a huge loss for Dallas and all of its residents — both the two- and four-legged variety.

Jamison led a remarkable turnaround of the city's poorly run shelter into one of the best in the U.S. He made public safety, starting with southern Dallas' loose dog crisis, the shelter's top priority and yet still managed to dramatically reduce its euthanasia rate.

But as of March 29, his new job will be chief executive officer of the no-kill Operation Kindness nonprofit. "It was all about the opportunity — nothing else," Jamison said during my first say-it-ain't-so call to him.

When retiring CEO Bob Catalani pitched the job to Jamison, the time seemed right to move into nonprofit work, especially given that the newly expanded Operation Kindness

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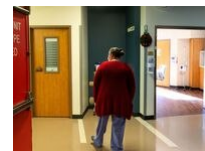
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OPINION



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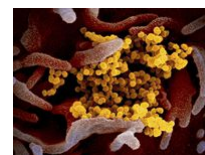
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plans to increase its collaborations with government shelters.

“This gives me a chance to help animals all over North Texas,” Jamison said.

Jamison also believes he is leaving Dallas Animal Services with a deep leadership bench and the right road map in place.

“The DAS team is rocking and rolling. They are the ones who do the work,” Jamison said. “Unless someone changes the mission on them, they know what to do ... as long as they have the resources behind them.”

I've spent enough time inside Dallas Animal Services to know Jamison is right about that. But those of us who have watched City Hall for decades know that it's a constant game of whack-a-moling whichever department deficiencies are most on elected leaders' radar.



COMMENTARY

How the dogs and cats are faring since the coronavirus locked the doors of the Dallas animal shelter

BY SHARON GRIGSBY

In case you've forgotten, the previous shelter leadership failed so miserably that Dallas Police Department commanders had to be put in charge in late 2016. Several years before that, concerned citizens and

journalists had begun documenting the loose and dangerous dog problem.

Not until the deadly mauling of South Dallas resident Antoinette Brown by a pack of dogs in May 2016 did City Hall finally quit dragging its heels. The changes city leaders made eventually led to Jamison's hiring.

Even as Dallas Animal Services marked month after month — then year after year — of victories, Jamison stood firm on the resources and support needed for success.

It would be naïve for any of us to assume that all will be well without Jamison at the helm. Even he acknowledged that the shelter's work is far from done. "We were able to start being able to hit our stride, but there is still a long way to go."

Dallas businessman Peter Brodsky, who served as chair of the city's Animal Commission for most of Jamison's tenure, said Ed is one of the best public servants he's ever had the chance to work with.

"He truly cares about animals and people, he is humble and he is a very effective manager, attracting great talent and infusing the organization with a passion for their mission," Brodsky told me.

With significant support from the City Council and City Manager T.C. Broadnax, Jamison "transformed DAS into a best-in-

class shelter and the whole city owes him a debt of gratitude,” Brodsky said.

Brodsky is among those who were deep in the fight to try to fix Dallas Animal Services well before Brown’s mauling. Noting the upcoming five-year anniversary of her death, he said it’s imperative that City Hall remains focused on the issues that led to the tragedy.

That’s why, under Jamison, Dallas Animal Services’ North Star has been to stick rigorously to its public safety mandate — with no shortcuts. At the same time, the team did what naysayers swore wasn’t possible: effectively battling the loose dog crisis while also closing in on the coveted 90% live-release rate that designates a shelter as “no kill.”



A Dallas Animal Services staff member photographed a cat last spring for posting on the department’s social media and adoption pages. No formal talks have begun regarding reopening the shelter to in-person visits, but outgoing director Ed Jamison expects those discussions to begin in coming weeks. (Juan Figueroa)

Today far fewer southern Dallas residents feel they must arm themselves with golf clubs or tree limbs to stroll their own neighborhoods.

Families can walk their pets without fear, and children can safely play outdoors.

But animal welfare is always an emotional business, especially when it comes to enforcement. One side or the other, the owner or the complainant, will wind up mad at the end of every transaction.

As the public face of Dallas Animal Services, Jamison spent a lot of time taking that heat so his staff could focus on their own difficult jobs.

“It’s hot in that seat,” Jamison said. “It’s really, really hard.”

It’s not the impressive live-release rate or the loose dog solutions that Jamison sees as his most important DAS work, but rather making sure that the almost 220 employees knew every day that they had the support to do their jobs right.

“We changed a lot at DAS — almost everything — but we always made sure they understood what was expected and that we had their backs,” Jamison said.

When it comes to who will be the best next boss, he said, “it’s all about someone who can understand the dynamics and culture inside that building.”



Animal keeper John Silvestri and animal care technician Brigitte Beddow led a Great Dane to the parking lot for curbside pickup at Dallas Animal Services last summer. Once the pandemic began, DAS converted to an online adoption process. Recently it's begun hosting a few adoption events outdoors. (Smiley N. Pool)

In the dozens of interviews I've done with Jamison since fall 2017, I can't recall a time when he took credit for anything. He invariably pointed out all the individual actions by every animal services staffer, volunteer, foster and rescuer — plus council members and City Hall staff — that were behind the success.

The shelter's "Be Dallas90" campaign is a great example. The slogan references both the DAS goal of a 90% live-release rate and its desire for everyone in Dallas to participate in animal welfare efforts.

The recently released [celebratory video](#) — your opportunity to see elected leaders and other familiar faces dance with their adopted pets — is hard to watch without choking up.

Its message: In fiscal year 2020, despite the pandemic, DAS hit the milestone of exceeding a 90% live-release rate: saving

21,275 pets. “In a year full of challenges, you helped us save lives,” it tells us all.

Maybe all we did was post an adoption notice, share resource information with a neighbor or trust the shelter enough to call them for help or advice. But it's those scores of tiny actions that led to the shelter hitting the 90% mark.

After a year of online-only adoptions, the shelter has just resumed a few outdoor events. Jamison said no decision has yet been made on when the main adoption center will reopen. “But we're close to beginning those discussions,” he said, before correcting himself.

When the DAS adoption doors are unlocked, he won't be there to greet those first pet seekers.



Dallas Animal Services director Ed Jamison waded into the reflecting pool at City Hall on April 23, 2019, to help herd a family of ducklings to safety after they had tried unsuccessfully much of the day to clear the lip of the pool. (Corbin Rubinson)

The story that best sums up Ed Jamison occurred on a rainy April 2019 day when a dozen day-old ducklings were unable to follow their mother out of the huge reflecting pool at City Hall Plaza.

Jamison happened to be at City Hall for a meeting and, when it was over, he discovered elected officials and staffers all over the building fretting about the fate of the feathered babies. No matter how many times mama duck jumped in and out to guide them from the water, the little ones couldn't maneuver over the lip of the concrete pool.

The DAS boss sprinted to his truck for odds and ends with which he devised a makeshift ramp. Then Jamison rolled up his dress pants, waded in and **herded the ducklings onto dry land** — as everyone applauded from the balconies and windows above.

Ed Jamison has deserved that kind of thanks every day these last 3½ years. I hope he felt our support as much as his own staff felt his backing. And as he finishes out his last two weeks, I hope he gets one more hearty round of applause.



[Sharon Grigsby](#). I'm the Metro columnist, which means that if it's happening in North Texas, I'm likely to write about it. My work on Baylor's sexual assault scandal earned a spot as a 2018 Pulitzer finalist. I was born in Waco, raised my

own family in the suburbs and have been back in Dallas ever since.

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