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CONTACT: Karel Minor
Office: 610-921-2349 ext. 10
kminor@berkshumane.org
ADDITIONAL CONTACT: Joan Brown
717-393-6551 ext. 239

Humane Society of Berks County and Humane League of Lancaster County Partner In Regional Dog Licensing Initiative

The Humane Society of Berks County (HSBC), Berks County's leader in animal welfare, announced today it has partnered with the Humane League of Lancaster County in a first-ever regional dog licensing initiative. The initiative is the first joint effort under a recently established mutual support agreement entered into by the two agencies. The licensing effort was undertaken to increase the number of properly licensed dogs in Berks and Lancaster Counties and decrease the number of unidentified strays entering the two organizations' shelters. Unidentified strays have a substantially lower owner claim rate and face a greater chance of euthanasia. "The Humane Society of Berks County is extremely proud to have entered into this ground breaking partnership with Humane League of Lancaster County," said HSBC executive director Karel Minor. "The regional licensing initiative will have a very real impact on the lives of animals in our area."

The two animal welfare agencies chose the licensing initiative as their first joint venture because of the impact licensing and identification has on the safety of animals in Pennsylvania. Although all dogs over 12 weeks of age are required to be licensed in Pennsylvania, by many estimates a majority are not. Under State law, municipal and non-profit animal shelters are only required to hold unlicensed stray dogs for 48 hours. After 48 hours the dogs can be put up for adoption or euthanized. With a current, displayed dog license that holding period goes up to 10 days. "Virtually every dog with a current, displayed license gets returned to its owner swiftly," said Minor. "Unlicensed dogs are significantly less likely to be returned to their original owner before the legal holding period is up and they are adopted or worse. This is literally a matter of life or death"

Each agency will be mailing a license application to every household with a resident holding a 2006 dog license. License holders may obtain a license through the mail or by purchasing one directly at

either agency's shelter or other locations throughout Berks and Lancaster County. Applications may also be downloaded at the HSBC's website, www.berkshumane.org. License holders are also given an opportunity to make an additional voluntary donation to the agency through with the mail license application. In both Counties, the State, County, and Municipal governments rely upon the stray boarding services and dog law enforcement role of the two agencies. However, very little funding is provided for these services. The result is that these services are made possible only through the subsidy of the organizations' charitable donors. "By mailing these applications to every household with a licensed dog in our two counties we are helping the State enforce its dog laws," said Minor. "By giving dog owners the opportunity to make a voluntary donation in support of our shelters, we are giving pet owners the chance to make sure that we can remain a safe haven for lost pets." The two agencies combined provide shelter to a nearly 20,000 animals a year.

The reciprocal support agreement that led to this license initiative was established to more effectively address animal welfare issues regionally. "This joint dog licensing initiative partnership with the HSBC will save lives and shows how much more effectively we can tackle a problem when we work together with other agencies in our region," said Joan Brown, Humane League of Lancaster County president/CEO. "By combining efforts our organizations can make an even bigger impact on the lives of animals over an even larger area than we could individually." Karel Minor concurs, "The problems facing animals and their people don't end at the Berks County border. Effective partnership and collaboration are the only way we are going to make a real difference in animal welfare." Other collaborations between the two organizations will be announced throughout 2007.

The Humane Society of Berks County is a nationally recognized animal welfare agency serving all of Berks County and surrounding communities, sheltering nearly 7,000 animals each year. It is a private, non-profit organization funded through donations and service fees. In addition to enforcing Pennsylvania's animal cruelty laws, the Humane Society offers award-winning adoption services, spay and neuter services, humane education, pet behavioral counseling, and helps stray, injured and mistreated animals. The Humane Society of Berks County is located at 1801 N. 11th Street, Reading. More information is available at www.berkshumane.org.

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