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Chicago dog licenses sold online for first time

CHICAGO (STNG) -- Dog owners have been thumbing their noses at the city's mandatory dog license for decades. Chicago has roughly 500,000 dogs. It sells only 20,745 licenses.

That's even though the fee for neutered dogs remains a bargain \$5, compared to a non-neutered fee of \$50.

Now, City Clerk Miguel del Valle is trying to boost dog licensing -- not with the fines once threatened by his predecessor, but by making dog licenses more convenient to purchase and affix.

For the first time, dog owners can purchase licenses online at www.ChiCityClerk.com. and get a sticker that fits on the back of a rabies tag. The sticker replaces the time-consuming process of using a manual crank to press expiration dates onto brass tags.

This month, the clerk's office is also sending out its first 5,000 renewal notices to Chicago dog owners who got rabies shots for their pets. The rolling notices will continue as rabies tags expire.

And the clerk's dog lovers' task force is looking to "add value" to the dog license by planning a "dog event" where owners can bring their pets and get advice from trainers and veterinarians.

Jay Rowell, deputy director of the clerk's office, noted that dog licenses are now required to gain access to doggie day care and overnight boarding facilities and dog-friendly parks.

If licensed dogs get lost, they're easier to retrieve and can be held at the Office of Animal Care and Control.

And dog licensing revenues are used to hire Animal Care inspectors and bankroll spay/neutering programs.

For years, former City Clerk Jim Laski threatened to crack the whip against recalcitrant dog owners by matching the city's short list of licensed dogs with Cook County's 100,000-plus list of Chicago dogs with rabies shots.

Laski got around to mailing 3,130 warning letters -- and convincing one-third of those owners to purchase licenses -- before becoming the highest-ranking city official to be convicted in the Hired Truck scandal.

Del Valle apparently is not interested in playing the heavy.

"This office never reminded anyone about the need to do this. It's incumbent on us to tell them of this obligation before we threaten people with fines," Rowell said.

The change in dog licensing comes as a City Council committee continues to consider a spay and neutering mandate for nearly all dogs and cats older than six months.

Critics question how a city where mandatory dog licensing is widely ignored can possibly enforce a spay and neutering edict.

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