

Animal shelter opens in new digs

After struggles with the SPCA, Santa Cruz County's animal services agency has moved to Scotts Valley and welcomes visitors wanting to adopt a pet or locate missing ones.

Animal
Shelter

By David L. Beck
Mercury News

STmn
2-7-03

The old, familiar dog-and-cat sounds are finally being heard at the new Animal Services Agency of Santa Cruz County. "We have barking and meowing," said director Mike McFarland.

Now staffers hope to hear the sounds of people, too. The agency has been outfitting a shelter and offices for itself in a leased Scotts Valley industrial building near Highway 17, after the county's yearlong struggle to maintain, and then replace, its working relationship with the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Animal-services staff members began moving in in December, but animals just arrived this week, and the staff, many veterans of SPCA service, is glad to be around them again.

"Look at that coat! You are stunning!" exclaimed Tricia Geisreiter, the animal-services coordinator, at a blue-eyed, salt-and-pepper malamute mix.

"Hi, gorgeous!" she cooed to a perky white cat. "Aren't you pretty?"

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The new facility has 20 dog kennels and will have 20 more. There are 48 cat kennels, which are being leased from the SPCA until the next fiscal year. There will be a room for small animals — right now, a pair of rabbits and a pair of guinea pigs live in the front lobby — as well as isolation areas, a veterinary clinic and other facilities, including cat-socialization rooms for volunteers and potential pet owners.

McFarland hopes the work will be done by the end of February.

The SPCA still owes the county more than \$700,000, according to county figures. And it still owns the shelter on Seventh Avenue that it operated under contract with the county and its partners — Santa Cruz, Capitola, Scotts Valley and the University of California.

The purchase of all or most of that shelter property by the county is not out of the question. McFarland said representatives of the SPCA and the Joint Powers Authority that now runs animal services inspected the property Wednesday.

Meanwhile, though, animal services has a three-year lease at \$13,250 a month on the

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Scotts Valley building, and is putting \$124,000 into improvements, including drains, plumbing and ventilation.

Since the launch of the Animal Services Agency in July, strays and abandoned animals have been boarded throughout the county at kennels and veterinary offices. The new facility not only centralizes operations but also gives people in search of a lost pet — or hoping to find a new one — a place to go besides the Internet, where the agency has been posting snapshots for months.

"The word's not out yet," Geisreiter said. "We are getting telephone calls, and we are getting a few people coming in. But not the same level that we had at the SPCA. People don't know where to go."

A residential neighborhood had grown up around the SPCA shelter, and neighbors complained about the animals' noise, especially at night. If the county ends up buying it, noise abatement will be a priority. The new shelter has no residential neighbors.

On the down side, said McFarland, the new location has no indoor-outdoor kennels, and only limited places for dogs to be exercised. For the most part, they will have to be walked on a leash.

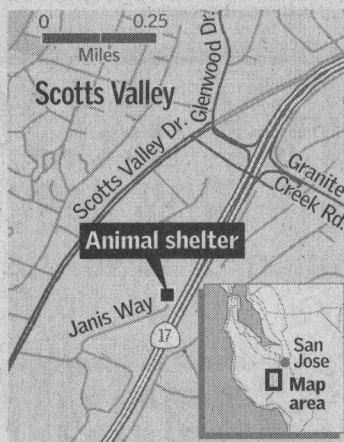
And unlike the SPCA shelter, the new one has no place for large animals — horses, goats, cows and sheep.

Originally budgeted for 28,



PATRICK TEHAN — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

Erica Thomas, a technician at the shelter in Scotts Valley, above, carries Judge the dog back to his cage. Comet, a mastiff puppy, awaits adoption at the new Santa Cruz County Animal Services' facility.



Source: ESRI, GDT MERCURY NEWS

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ANIMAL-SERVICES COORDINATOR

animal services on a temporary basis last summer, and decided to stay. "I'm having the most fun I've had, probably, in about 15 years," he said. "I realized it really was the love of my life, as far as a career goes."

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

Animal Services Agency of Santa Cruz County is at 27 Janis Way, Scotts Valley. Call (831) 454-7303. On the Web, go to www.co.santa-cruz.ca.us and click on Rescued/Adoptable Animals.

Contact David L. Beck at dbeck@sjmercury.com or at (831) 423-0960.

the agency has a staff of 22, and as the SPCA did before, it will rely on the kindness of volunteers.

Geisreiter was part of the SPCA staff that switched to county service as of July 1. McFarland spent many years working with animals, but his most recent job was as chief administrator in the Santa Cruz County District Attorney's Office.

He was asked to take over