

# Animal rescue seeks a new lease on life

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SANTA CRUZ — A board of directors is forming again in hopes of reviving Native Animal Rescue, a wildlife rehabilitation center which closed earlier this month.

If successful, the new board will go after the funding and the building needed to reopen what was the county's only licensed wildlife rehabilitation clinic, according to Cliff Feldman, a board member working to rebuild the organization.

"We're trying at this moment just to sort of take a deep breath," said Feldman.

Most of the board, including president Gayle Ortiz,

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## Native animal rescue revives

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resigned Thursday, less than a week after the center locked its doors.

Two former members stayed on and another joined the ranks of the troubled organization.

Ortiz said the new board has the backing and encouragement of the outgoing members. "It wasn't a rift at all," Ortiz said of the mass resignation. "Those of us who left knew what it would take to build something new," she said. "It was enough work before. It's going to be even more now."

The organization closed Aug. 14 in the emotional and financial aftermath of a sea bird epidemic. The epidemic simply overwhelmed the largely-volunteer organization, run from one crowded room next to the SPCA.

After the epidemic, executive director Lori Moak-Kean and the two paid staff members resigned. Ortiz said the board had no alternative but to close and move the remaining animals in its care to rehabilitation centers outside the county and foster care homes.

Over the past 15 years, the wildlife center has run on a thin budget of donations. Last year it reached its peak: a budget of about \$70,000, said Feldman.

Until July, when it got a combined \$1,000 from the Santa Cruz City Council and the county Board of Supervisors, the organization had never received government funding.

To revive, it needs more, said Feldman. Based on the 2,400 animals treated last year, the organization should have an annual budget of about \$275,000, he said. That figure is based on comparisons with other rehabilitation centers.

But Feldman is aiming at a much lower annual

budget of between \$130,000 to \$150,000.

"With that, we can do a really good job at least in a temporary location and work toward a permanent location as our funding base increases," he said.

Ideally, the organization's funding should come in equal parts from donations, foundations and government sources, he said.

"It takes a concerted effort to get those," Feldman said. "We never had a large enough staff to work on that."

A priority of the new board will be to get an annual allocation of about \$50,000 from the county and cities, he said.

Ortiz said the center has tentatively been offered space at what used to be The Farm restaurant and gardens on Soquel Drive. The county now owns the property.

Getting the site "looks very promising," she said.

Following the closing, a number of small donations and offers of support were given.

Among those that came courting with hopes of offering money were Santa Cruz Supervisor Fred Keeley and state Sen. Henry Mello.

But neither offer has panned out, Ortiz said. The state Department of Fish and Game money that Mello's office offered was to build a facility at the planned Terrace Point development on Santa Cruz's Westside. That controversial development, in the process of getting building approvals, is about two years from being built.

"It's so far in the future and so political, our board hasn't even discussed it," said Ortiz.

Remaining from the original board with Feldman is Lana Pieri of Watsonville. The new board member is Rob Stevens of Aptos.