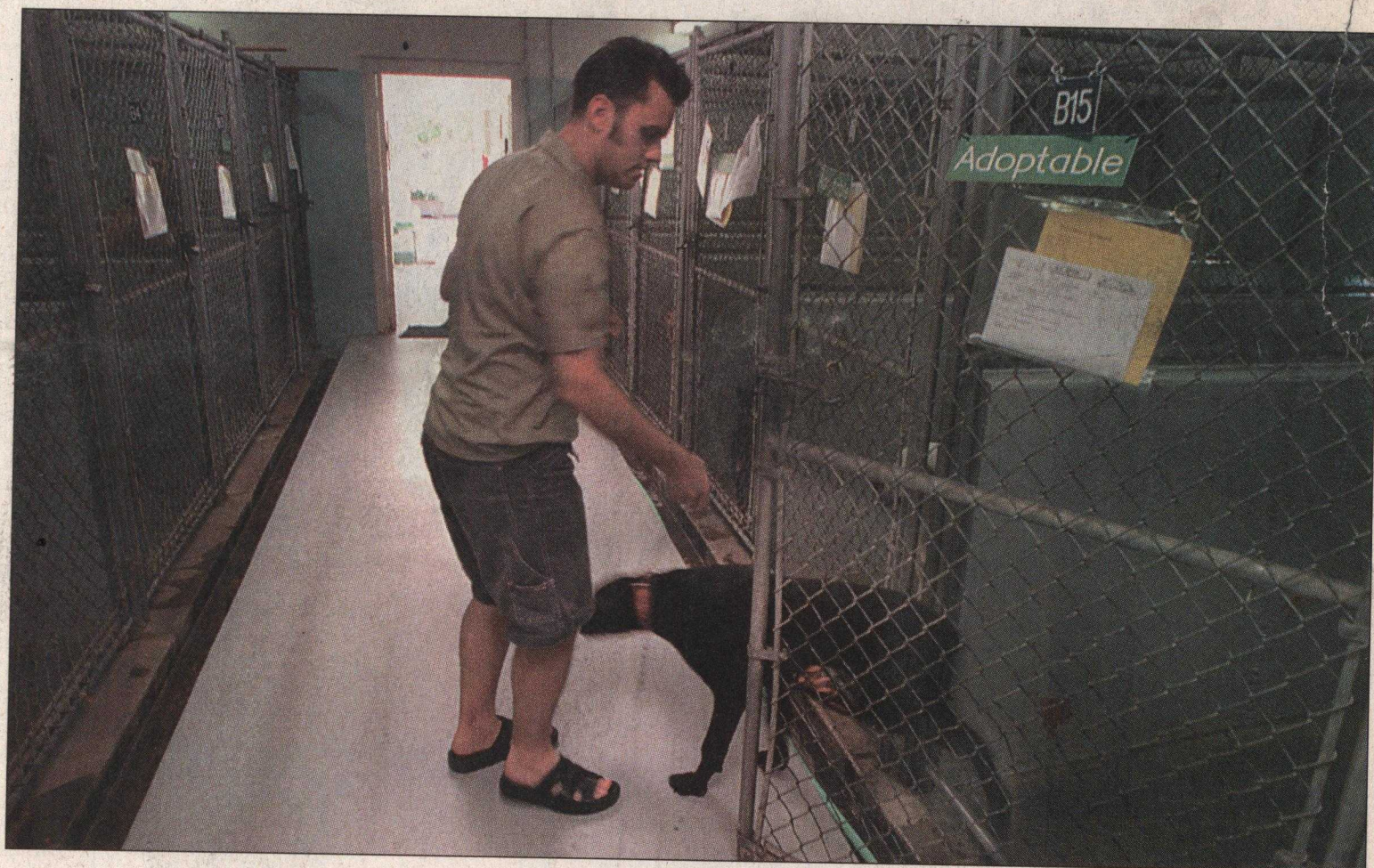


SPCA official makes landlords his pet project

Santa Cruz animal shelter strives to help renters find a place to live — with their dogs and cats



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Kenny Heggem takes a dog for some exercise Wednesday. The animal was left at the SPCA because its former owner was moving into a home where the landlord doesn't allow pets.

By RAMONA TURNER
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — Pet owners having trouble finding rental housing because landlords forbid four-legged critters have someone on their side.

Meet Kenny Heggem, the SPCA's new outreach coordinator charged with increasing the number of pet-friendly rentals in Santa Cruz County.

"About 10 percent of animals that come into our shelter are due to landlord-related reasons. It's sad to see kids crying when they come into the shelter and the dogs and cats sense something is wrong," said Heggem, who previously worked in pet adoptions.

Heggem, the owner of a cockatiel, insists renters with pets are the best tenants because they tend to be long-term residents and are responsible for the pet and thus the property.

A glance through the Sentinel's classified rental listings shows a large percentage of landlords don't allow pets.

"Some owners have had bad experiences with

them," said Tom Kelley, property manager with TRG Property Management in Aptos. TRG owns 157 properties from Westside Santa Cruz to Salinas Road, and the majority do not allow pets.

"They don't want the place destroyed, like cats clawing door facings, spraying the carpets and dogs ruining lawns," Kelley said.

Heggem suggests landlords charge an extra deposit or cleaning fee for pet owners. He said some renters have offered to pay the cost of replacing carpets their pet may have damaged.

Kelley doesn't think the extra expense is worth it. "I don't think (renters would) be able to come up with that kind of money," he said.

Replacing the carpet in a two-bedroom apartment costs about \$2,100, Kelley said.

Brenda Perry understands the landlord anti-pet mentality, but wishes they would understand her plight as well.

Perry and her husband, John, who is a retired electrical contractor, live in San Jose and want to return

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Tenants and pets

ADVICE FOR LANDLORDS

- Request references for applicant pet's behavior, health and reproductive status.
- Charge a deposit or cleaning fee for pet owners.
- Define standards for pet owners in the rental agreement, such as having the animal spayed or neutered, on a leash when not inside the home and having pet owners pick up their critters' messes.
- Set parameters on the property, which may include having a designated area for pets.

ADVICE FOR RENTERS WITH PETS

- Write a resume or document your pet's habits, behavior and health status.
- Have your pet spayed or neutered and document it.
- Offer to pay a deposit for your pet and cleaning fee when you move.

'About 10 percent of animals that come into our shelter are due to landlord-related reasons.'

KENNY HEGGEM, SPCA OUTREACH COORDINATOR

SPCA

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to Santa Cruz County to retire.

"It already hurts to be in a position to rent and then be told that you can't have an animal that you've had for nine years," Perry said of her miniature Rottweiler-Australian cattle dog mix, named Sissy.

"They don't want you to do anything except pay a huge rent, and then some places aren't even worth what they're asking," she said.