

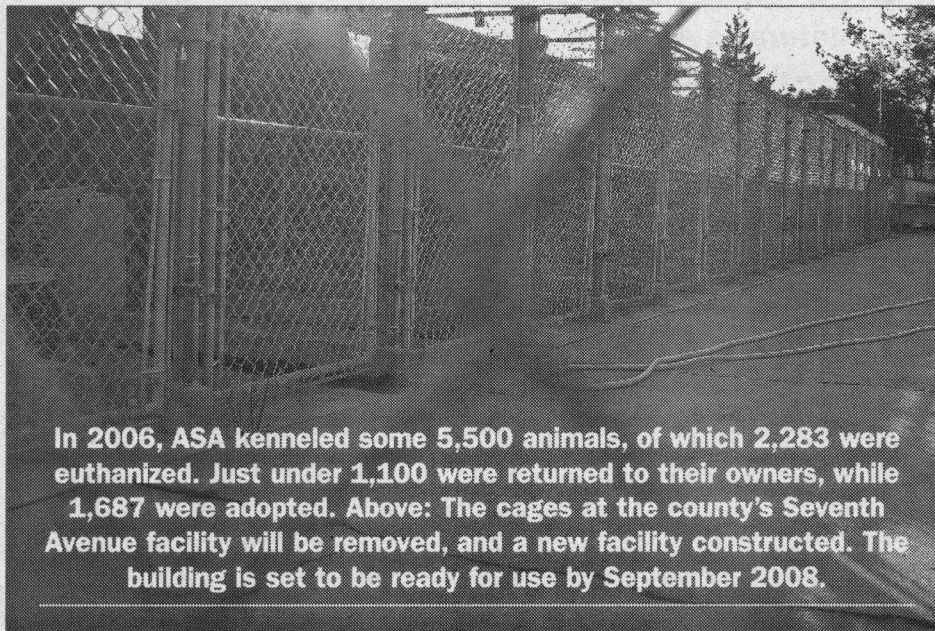
A New Home for Strays: County Supervisors OK \$5 Million New Animal Shelter in Live Oak

Animal Shelter
by Michael Thomas

Lost and abandoned cats and dogs will soon have a cozier place to await adoption in Santa Cruz County. The County's Board of Supervisors has approved a contractor's bid to construct a new, top-quality shelter on the site of the former SPCA facility at Seventh Avenue and Rodriguez Street in Live Oak.

The building is slated for completion by next September, at which point the County's Animal Services Authority (ASA) will move from its temporary digs in Scotts Valley to the more central location.

"People have been going to that site for many, many years and we feel that by returning to that site, it will increase our adoptions," said ASA general manager Katherine Vos. "It's exciting. The staff and the volunteers here have been waiting for this to come to fruition for several years now."



In 2006, ASA kenneled some 5,500 animals, of which 2,283 were euthanized. Just under 1,100 were returned to their owners, while 1,687 were adopted. Above: The cages at the county's Seventh Avenue facility will be removed, and a new facility constructed. The building is set to be ready for use by September 2008.

Additionally, the new shelter project comes at a time when existing facilities are filled to capacity.

In 2002, the county established its own animal services agency after canceling a long-running contract with the

local chapter of the SPCA. An audit had revealed that the SPCA misspent at least \$715,000 in county funds. Then in 2004, the county purchased the SPCA's building for \$1.6 million. Renovations were considered, but a new structure

was deemed to be more cost effective.

As a non-profit agency, the local chapter of the SPCA continues to provide a variety of services in the county, including low-cost spay and neuter services, assistance for senior pet owners and care for sick, injured or abandoned animals.

However, the ASA is the agency responsible for most lost and adoptable animals. In 2004, the agency took over operation of the city of Watsonville's shelter, which will remain open following the construction of the new shelter.

Building Cost Less than Expected

The new shelter will be paid for with Redevelopment Agency funds, and construction bids came in well below the engineer's estimate of \$5.6 million. All three bids were less than \$5 million.

The winning bid, submitted by Ralph Larson and Son Inc., of San

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Mateo, was \$4,448,000. With a 10 percent contingency added on, the total came to \$4,892,800.

The new shelter will be a single-story, wood-framed, ranch-style building designed to blend in with the predominantly residential neighborhood.

"It should be visually appealing," said ASA spokesperson Tricia Geisreiter.

While the ASA's current location is a retrofitted industrial space, building a shelter from the ground up made it possible to include things like integrated dog kennels that have indoor and outdoor space.

"We are going to be getting a lot of new equipment," Geisreiter added.

Instead of the plastic kennels used for cats in Scotts Valley, the shelter will have stainless steel cages that are easier to clean.

While officials weren't able to say exactly how many animals the new shelter will accommodate, they said it will be considerably more spacious.

The ASA's veterinarian has been operating with limited space and will now have modern facilities.

Adoption Space Planned

The shelter will have five "meet and greet" areas where visitors can get to know animals, as well as three large exercise areas.

"We walk our dogs three or four times a day. It releases their stress so when people walk in [looking for a pet to adopt], they are not acting 'cage crazy,'" Vos said.

County supervisor Jan Beautz expects noise to be mitigated by design features such as independently contained dog kennels.

"Part of it is how well insulated [the building] is and part of it is behavioral. The dogs won't be able to see each other and that should cut down on the barking."

The ASA handles more than just cats and dogs. There are numerous rabbits waiting for adoption at any time, and farm animals such as horses and cows are occasionally taken in.

In one unusual case some years back, the SPCA even took charge of an emu that was left tied up in front of Watsonville High School.

For such large animals, the new shelter will include a barn on the property. ■