

Helping Watsonville's animals



Tarmo Hannula

Shelter supervisors Andre Rivera (left) and Richard Teixeira (right) pose with Bill Meade, vice president of Humane Animal Services, outside the new Humane Animal Care Services building with a few of the lost dogs that have been recovered and are awaiting the owners to reclaim them.

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Animal shelter has 'no-kill' policy

By LIA MARTIN

STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — Watsonville opened the doors last week to its first animal shelter, thanks to the generosity of a former resident who left \$300,000 to take care of pets within the city limits.

Gabrielle Olive Vierra left the bequest to the city of Watsonville to use solely for the purpose of establishing an animal shelter. Vierra was a resident here for many years, later moving to France. After her death, her attorney informed city officials that Vierra had left the money to the city for the benefit of lost or unwanted pets.

Established as a non-profit agency, Humane Animal Care Services is housed in a 3,000 square-foot building designed and contracted by Bill Meade. Meade, who is known for his technical expertise and dedication to a "no-kill" policy, was hired by the city to build the facility and hire the staff. The shelter will house up to



A pair of fragile kittens and a friendly red dog who'd rather be on the other side of the bars are among the animals being sheltered by Humane Animal Care Services ... and awaiting a new owner to take care of them.

40 to 45 pets.

The final cost of the building upon completion was \$400,000. The extra \$100,000 needed to finish the building was provided by the city through collections on public facilities impact fees, said Eric Frost,



administrative services director for the city.

The operating costs, Frost said, will be paid out of the city's general fund and will not exceed \$150,000 per year. Within that budget will be operating costs of one vehicle and

The Humane Animal Care Services shelter, located at 580 Airport Blvd., Watsonville, is open Monday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., with extended hours on Tuesday and Thursday until 7 p.m. For information on volunteering, adoption policies or searching for a lost pet, call 728-6078.

a paid staff of three full-time employees.

The shelter has been operating since last week and has scheduled a grand opening for Aug. 23. The public is invited to inspect the facilities then from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Volunteers will be making up

See SHELTER, page 3

SHELTER

From page 1

a large part of the staff, and will be used in three different areas, said Meade.

- Working with the animals — brushing, exercising or just plain socializing with them.

- Marketing the shelter to create adoption programs for the pets.

- Working on free dog and cat licensing program campaigns to reduce the chances of owners losing their pets.

Because of Meade's philosophy and the desire of the city council members, HACC is taking a new approach to animal sheltering. It will have a no-euthanasia philosophy. Its goal is to place animals, rather than put half or more of its animal population to sleep as occurs at other shelters.

Meade said that traditionally, the way to control animal overpopulation was to kill them.

"Oftentimes a shelter becomes a slaughterhouse for pets," said Meade. "Residents use them as a dumping ground for animals."

In the last 30 years, efforts have been made by animal shelters to lower those percentages. After spaying and neutering programs

were put into operation, Meade said, the pet animal population was lowered to the point where not killing the animals has become a viable option for more shelters.

For an example, Meade said that one of the two San Francisco SPCA shelters has a "no-kill" policy. However, he said, after using every means to adopt the pets out, they can still use the other facility to put the unwanted pets to sleep.

The Watsonville shelter does not have the means to euthanize animals, said Meade. When there is a situation where a pet is hurt, has a bad disposition or can not be adopted out, veterinarians will be used to put them to sleep painlessly. Meade estimates this will be 5 percent of the pet population at the shelter,

Meade said that because of the policy to maximize adoptions, educate the community, reduce strays by a free-licensing policy and provide the community with free adoptions and health checks, putting animals to sleep would happen infrequently.