

Virtual eviction for SPCA

Shelter sold due to financial problems

By MICHAEL OPPENHEIMER
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

It takes a lot of money to run an animal shelter and provide the many other services that the Santa Cruz County Animal Welfare Association — better known as the SPCA — make available to the communities in Santa Cruz County. Both the SPCA and the public entities involved agree on that.

They just don't agree on how much.

"They say that the animal control services can be run for about \$750,000 per year," said SPCA interim Executive Director Doreen Lozano. "We think, accounting for the cost of living, it would take around \$1.3 million."

"They" are the public entities which have been in contract with the SPCA for those services, which include the county of Santa Cruz, the cities of Capitola and Scotts Valley and Santa Cruz and the University of California, Santa Cruz.

"Once they cut funding, that means they will (eventually) cut staff, and that means that more animals will die," Lozano said. "It's just a math equation at that point."

The financial problems at the SPCA were known to the governing board, according to Lozano, and while it was known the entities did not want to spend more money, the SPCA was still surprised by the actions taken during negotiations for a new contract. The current three-year contract comes to a close at the end of this month.

"We told (the entities) a



Michael Oppenheimer/Register-Pajaronian

Lobo is one excited German Shepherd as he spends his activity time with SPCA volunteer Katie Gaty-Delia Wednesday.

while ago that we knew about \$220,000 we owed them and had to reduce services to try to make up for it," Lozano said. "Then, when we came to the negotiation table to try and work out a new contract, they announced their own audit had 'found' the same deficit."

That same audit also found another \$500,000 in disputed funds, although all of it was spent in public service and is currently under review by the entities to decide whether to absorb the expense. That decision could come as early as Monday.

The financial problems, plus the entities' unwillingness to make what the SPCA considered a

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satisfactory increase in the value of the contract, caused the negotiation to come crashing to a halt.

Finally, deciding that there was no way they could come to an agreement that would allow them to operate at a level that would afford staff a living wage or run the shelter effectively, the SPCA decided they could no longer run the shelter and negotiations began Monday for the entities to buy the facility.

"The details are not worked out but some ideas being bandied around include less staff, closing an extra day, etc.," said SPCA Public Affairs Coordinator Caitlyn Toropova. "The County says they are determined to provide the same level of care we have been giving."

One of the questions that has the members of the SPCA worried is the disposition of some of the more exotic members of the shelter, including two donkeys,

which have been residents for a few years, and a horse which was seized within the last week on suspicion of neglect.

The SPCA, a non-profit organization which has always relied on fund-raising to support its various programs outside of just the shelter, "has every intention of continuing the mission and work they currently do" with that support.

Those services include humane animal care education, investigations into allegations of mistreatment, mobile adoptions, mobile spay and neutering clinics and more.

"We'll continue to do what we can," Lozano said. "I suspect that it will take at least a year or two before we will be able to open another facility."

Once they have a new facility, the SPCA will once again try to offer the services they can in the way they feel is necessary and humane.

"We never want to kill any of the animals that come through here," Toropova said. "That is our biggest worry."

SPCA fundraiser more important than ever

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The third annual SPCA "Day of Wine and Wet Noses" fundraiser takes place Saturday from 2-5 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall of the First Congregational Church (900 High Street, Santa Cruz) and this year — when it is more important than ever — promises to be its best one yet.

"We have got some of the best stuff we ever had," said Public Affairs Coordinator Caitlyn Toropova. "All kinds of stuff from local artists, vintners, gourmet cooks making dinners, etc. We also have weekend getaways to auction off and other prizes like that."

The donated items have been split into two groups, one group for a silent auction from 2-3:30 p.m. and the other for a live auction after the silent auction closes.

Throughout the event, Bonne Bouche Catering will provide hors d'oeuvres, local wineries will provide fine wines and the jazz group Crosswinds will be joined by Robin Ford to provide music. The live auction will be co-hosted by KFOX radio DJ Laurie Roberts.

And, of course, those wet-nosed guests will be in attendance. Cost is \$55 at the door. For more information contact the SPCA at 465-5017.