



## Field Trip

BY JULIE MILLER DOWLING

An artist's rendering of the Winnipeg Humane Society's new facility shows paneling made from renewable resources and other environmentally friendly features.  
WINNIPEG HUMANE SOCIETY

# Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

**The organization:** The Winnipeg Humane Society's roots reach back to the launch of Winnipeg's humane movement in the late 19th century—yes, the horse-and-buggy days. “We even have the original minutes,” says executive director Vicki Burns. “It was originally incorporated for the protection of women, children, and animals.”

**The mission:** “To protect all animals from suffering and to promote their welfare and dignity.”

**Date established:** 1894

**Resources:** 100 full- and part-time staff; about 200 active volunteers

**Population size served:** 700,000 in the city of Winnipeg, plus the rest of the province of Manitoba (a total of 1.1 million)

**Website:** [www.winnipeghumanesociety.ca](http://www.winnipeghumanesociety.ca)

**How they lend a hand:** As the province's primary animal welfare organization, the Winnipeg Humane Society does it all. The organization handles about 9,000 homeless animals each year, providing care, shelter, and placement. It also operates a subsidized spay/neuter program with in-house services and mobile clinics that travel all over Manitoba. The organization's expansive humane education programs are taught by three part-time teachers and offer popular community services, such as summer day camps for kids.

**How they help other animals:** “We also do quite a bit of advocacy on various animal welfare issues,” says Burns. “For example, we're quite vocal in terms of promoting what we think are humane farming practices.” So vocal, in fact, that the Winnipeg Humane Society has started a “WHS certified” label—a first for Canada—that approves meat and egg products raised by farmers who follow certain standards: no animal caging; minimum space requirements; no hormones or unnecessary antibiotics; and mandatory barn inspections by independent professionals.

**Biggest challenges:** In a word, cats. The Winnipeg Humane Society takes in three times as many cats as dogs and is struggling to find new ways to tackle cat overpopulation. Through its subsidized program, the organization spays and neuters more than 1,000 cats a year but, says Burns, “that alone is not the answer, so we are trying to figure out what is the answer. That's the biggest practical challenge we face at the shelter.”

**Source of pride:** Dogs. “We are doing so much more for dogs that come in here than we did ten years ago,” says Burns. The organization has a comprehensive behavior training program, a team of volunteers who work with dogs before they go into the adoption area, and an animal therapy program for youth in social services programs. “Basically every dog who goes into our adoption area is adopted. The number of dogs we euthanize is very

low, and we feel really good about that,” says Burns.

**Earth-friendly future:** This fall, the Winnipeg Humane Society's furry inhabitants and their caregivers will move into a 42,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility that features individual rooms for dogs, group housing for cats, a multipurpose classroom, a bigger veterinary clinic, outdoor walking trails, even a lake. The facility will receive a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold Certification from the Green Building Council of Canada. Sustainable design features include a stormwater retention pond, wind power for pond aeration, urban native plants requiring no irrigation, strawboard panels made from rapidly renewable wheat straw, geothermal heat pumps using groundwater wells, and materials with low levels of volatile organic compounds (which contribute to indoor pollution). (More of these features and illustrations of the new facility are available on the Winnipeg Humane Society website.)

“Not only is this going to be a really pleasant place for people to visit, but it's also going to be very environmentally friendly,” says Burns. “I think it promotes a message of respect for the environment, which is consistent with promoting a message of respecting animals.”

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