

Field Trip

BY MICHELLE RILEY

Appleton, Wisconsin

The organization: Fox Valley Humane Association (FVHA)

Year established: 1929

Annual operating budget: \$681,000

Resources: 32 staff members, 500 volunteers

Population served: 375,000

Area served: 35 municipalities (covering about 93 square miles)

Animals served per year: About 5,000

Website: foxvalleypets.org

No longer the dog pound: When Deb Lewis started as executive director of FVHA more than 21 years ago, the organization had a staff of four. Now it has eight times that number. In October 2005, FVHA moved from its old 3,500-square-foot facility into a new \$3.2-million, 21,000-square-foot building. Partnerships with 60 veterinarians at 16 clinics allow the organization to spay and neuter all its animals, stay up to date with vaccination protocols, and provide surgical care. As the only holding facility for cruelty-case animals in the area, FVHA also partners with law enforcement agencies. “We are no longer the small dog pound behind the production mill—we are an important aspect of our community,” says Lewis. “It’s amazing to be here now and to think back at how far we have come.”

Sailing through the changes: As the old facility approached its 20-year anniversary, FVHA staff and supporters decided the building needed more than a face-lift. So began a seven-year process to create



To see more photos of the new **Fox Valley Humane Association** building, go to animalsheltering.org/foxvalley.

WESTON IMAGING, LLC/PHIL WESTON

The Susan Schuster Pet Resource Center. After feasibility studies showed a new building was within reach, FVHA ended its dollar-a-year lease with the county, bought a four-acre parcel of land, and began the design process. The exterior of the shelter—which resembles Noah’s Ark—came to the architect in a dream, but every staff member contributed something to the final design.

While the shelter looks like a floating menagerie on the outside, the interior likely reflects more retail savvy than the biblical boat. (Noah, after all, wasn’t trying to get his animals adopted.) “When you walk into the front lobby, you have the feel that you’re walking into a mall,” says Lewis. The main corridor has different “shops” on each side, where all the animals are housed behind glass. “You can see lots of colors, and it comes off as a very positive and upbeat environment,” says Lewis.

Staff and visitors enjoy seeing animals in the lower-stress environment. “Words can not express how grateful I am because the comfort of the animals was taken into account,” says Lewis.

Private coffers: FVHA members wanted to raise the money for the building themselves. The \$2 million raised before and during construction included a \$1-million gift from longtime donor Marv Schuster, whose wife, Susan, had long been a supporter of the organization and had set aside the money for FVHA before she died. The shelter owes only \$800,000 now. Despite its municipal housing con-

tracts, the organization has taken no taxpayer money to fund the new building.

Prison dogs and human help: The new building is not all FVHA has to write home about. Through its “Rebound Program,” a small group of dogs with minor behavior problems lives with prisoners who train them (the prisoners are screened first and receive lessons in canine behavioral issues). Professional dog trainers visit each week to help and track the dogs’ progress. After 12 weeks, a graduation ceremony is held at the shelter, and visitors are often waiting to adopt the dogs. “We are taking dogs that couldn’t otherwise be adopted and fixing them instead of having to euthanize them,” says Lewis. Now in its third year, the Rebound Program just graduated its eighth class.

FVHA also provides free housing and care for pets belonging to people staying in any of the many human shelters in the area, a program started when a woman in an abusive relationship would not leave her partner because she had nowhere to take her pets. The organization also sends pets to spend time with people in hospice care and partners with a library on a “Reading with Dogs” program. “Partnerships will lead to the most amazing things for your animals and your people,” Lewis says. “It’s wonderful. The only thing that really holds you back in this industry is yourself. If you can dream it, you can have it. It took us from that very small decrepit shelter to this beautiful building.”