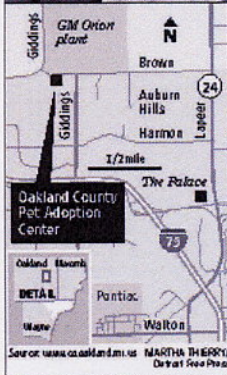


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OAKLAND COUNTY

THE PET PLACE: Animal lover donates a gazebo to Oakland County to be used for public adoptions of strays

December 6, 2005

BY BILL LAITNER
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

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A Sylvan Lake woman's gift of a gazebo to Oakland County is being billed as southeast Michigan's first permanent facility for public pet-adoption events.

When Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson cuts the ribbon on the \$20,000 gazebo today at the county animal shelter in Auburn Hills, Linda Wasche and other animal advocates hope it will reduce the region's need to euthanize strays.



zoom

Linda Wasche of Sylvan Lake holds a tree Monday as Matt Heffner digs a hole for it at the Auburn Hills gazebo that will be used for pet adoptions. Putting on the roof is Cliff Gerwig of All Play Construction. (Photos by MARY)

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Not only will the county use the gazebo for adoption events -- starting with Holiday Stray Day on Saturday -- but it also will be open to private nonprofit animal groups for their events, Wasche said.

Currently, adopt-a-pet events are staged throughout metro Detroit in various public places such as the Detroit Zoo or municipal grounds.

"It's been proven that adoption events are the most successful way to find new homes for animals," Wasche said.

The gazebo is a gift in memory of Wasche's father and the late-in-life bond he made to a stray cockapoo he adopted. It is also Wasche's latest use of a public-private partnership she helped forge to nudge Oakland County toward becoming the state's most progressive in animal protection.

Two years ago, Wasche and a small group of friends fostered a partnership between Oakland County's animal shelter manager, Larry Obrecht, and a nonprofit group they founded, the Oakland Pet Fund.

A year ago, she and the group talked Obrecht into starting CATS, or Companion Animals Touching Seniors, in which seniors receive an adult cat and free cat food and litter while deciding whether to keep the animal. A new program soon will do the same for adult dogs. Adult animals are traditionally the hardest to place, shelter managers say.

This month, the group launched an Internet newsletter they say is the first attempt to link all animal-rescue groups and shelters in southeast Michigan.

Obrecht said the group's goal is "no homeless pets and, ultimately, a no-kill policy" in Oakland County by 2010, a target that includes more than 100 shelters and rescue leagues in the county. In 2004, of the 254,897 dogs and cats taken in by Michigan animal shelters, more than half were destroyed, according to state records.

Obrecht said Monday that people are surprised he opened the county's grounds to private rescue groups.

"They say, 'You've got 100 dogs already and you're inviting other organizations here?' But the more people we get through here, the more they'll see our facility, and some will come through and take our animals, too," he said.

Contact **BILL LAITNER** at 248-351-3297.

FIND A COMPANION

- To adopt a pet, check out Holiday Stray Day, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday at the Oakland County Pet Adoption Center, 1700 Brown Road, Auburn Hills. Kittens, puppies, dogs and cats available. Call 248-391-4100 anytime or go to www.co.oakland.mi.us/anmictrl.

To find an adoptable animal with the characteristics you'd like, go to www.petfinder.com.

- To sign up for a new electronic newsletter on animal care and adoption in southeast Michigan, e-mail your name to fur-e-tails@oaklandpetfund.org.

BILL LAITNER