

New TAPS shelter nearly complete

By Tara Mattimoe

Times correspondent

PEKIN - TAPS is at last getting a new animal shelter/adoption center.

Anyone who has been to the current TAPS shelter well understands the need for this upgrade. The first thing one notices upon entering the building is the smell due to poor ventilation, and the lack of sufficient lighting.

Although the animals are well cared for and the cages are kept clean, it is a tiny building and woefully overcrowded.

Despite the creative use of the limited space available, it is a ramshackle maze of a place, with animals and supplies tucked into every nook and cranny.

Come October, such overcrowding should be a thing of the past.

The effort to raise money for the new shelter has been going on for about seven months, said Sue Kyle, chairman of the capital campaign to raise money for the shelter.

To date they have raised \$358,000.

Kyle said she has felt a great deal of support from the community throughout the fundraiser. "This area has been very generous," she said. "A lot has gone on this last year in the world, and I think all of the donors we have had - we feel very blessed."

Besides money donations, the capital campaign has also had a great deal of "in-kind" donations, in which individuals and businesses give services or supplies such as dry wall, medical supplies, plumbing, etc.

When asked why they need the new building, Kyle said simply, "It's completely overcrowded."

There are more animals than places to put them. She also said that the lack of proper ventilation in the building is a major problem.

Cats get upper respiratory diseases very easily, she said, and poor ventilation worsens the problem. It would cost more to try and fix all of the issues with the old building, she said, than to build a new one.

Work on the new building began in April, and it has gone quite smoothly so far, said Henry Cakora, TAPS board president.

Work to erect the building has been an all-volunteer by Blue Ridge Construction.

The building itself was sold to TAPS at cost, and Blue Ridge is making no money from the project.

"It was for a good cause," said John Palmer, head of Blue Ridge Construction and TAPS supporter. "They needed help."

Since starting his work with TAPS, Palmer has become a TAPS board member and serves on the executive committee. "It's very interesting, a learning experience," he said.

Volunteering his services had been a rewarding experience for Palmer. "It's a chance to do something good for the community," he said, and he enjoys being able to help the animals.

Palmer said he has learned a lot about the needs and care of animals. He said that TAPS staff and volunteers do far more than people think. Palmer said that prior to working so closely with TAPS, he had no idea how much work went into adopting out the animals.

"They (Blue Ridge) definitely rose to the occasion," Cakora said. "When things get desperate, someone always steps up.

"It's going to be very efficient, a nice building," Cakora said. "It will be nice to work in," and a big change from the present shelter.

The new TAPS shelter, though not yet finished, has all of the rooms laid out and marked for future use. At 5,875 square feet, the upcoming shelter will be more than twice the size of the 2,400-square-foot building presently used. The new shelter will have many new rooms, including an employee lounge, a board room, a waiting room and a bona fide office.

The office will be particularly useful for TAPS volunteers, who must currently walk around the building holding the phone, since there is nowhere for them to sit and conduct business. There also will be a comfortable waiting room for the public - current conditions allow for a only couple of chairs by the door.

The new shelter also will offer a separate room for the FIV cats, who have the feline equivalent of HIV. These animals must be kept separate from the other caged cats, but since there is no where to put them in the current shelter, they simply wander around the building freely. Staff often find them sleeping on the printers or curled up on desks, said Cakora.

"They might be the only ones who don't like the new building," he said with a laugh.

Other rooms that will greatly benefit the animals include, among others, cat and dog maternity, hospital, and surgery rooms, as well as a recovery room for animals returning from operations.

Some of the most exciting features the new building will have are new ventilation and heating systems, which will be much healthier for both animals and people. There will also be a doggie door in each large dog kennel, leading out into a spacious outdoor area, allowing the dogs to go in and out at will.

The grand opening of the new shelter will be in mid-October, when it will be open to the public. However, TAPS will not be able to accept animals in the new shelter for about a month after opening, Cakora said.

There will be further information published as the time approaches.

"It will be a party!" said Kyle of the grand opening.