

Humane Society Silicon Valley Opens 'Green' Shelter

\$25 million Animal Community Center includes pet adoption, spay/neuter center and pet-friendly cafe.

By Marissa Heflin

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Cats at the Animal Community Center will stay in cat condos, complete with beds and toys, rather than in a caged kennel. Humane Society Silicon Valley in Milpitas, Calif., recently celebrated the opening of what it says is California's first regional Animal Community Center.

The \$25 million center, funded through public donations, is expected to be the first Animal Community Center in the United States to earn a gold-level LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification from the U.S. Green Building Council.

Planning for the 48,000-square-foot center, on nearly five acres of land, began about 12 years ago and is designed to be much more than an animal shelter; it's a destination for the community, said Christine Benninger, president of the HSSV.

"Those words — Animal Community Center — were chosen specifically (to reflect that)," Benninger said.

For example, the center incorporates an animal adoption program; a community dog park and training center; a spay/neuter medical center; a veterinary hospital with a public viewing room; doggie daycare, boarding and grooming; a pet store; an education center with programs for children, teens and families; a community events room; and a pet-friendly café.

The cageless habitats for dogs, cats and rabbits simulate home environments, complete with comfy beds and various species-specific toys. This type of arrangement reduces animal stress and behavioral issues created by traditional shelter designs, according to HSSV. The new center will be able to accommodate about 10,000 animal adoptions a year, up from 4,000 previously.

The number of spay/neuter procedures that the medical center will perform is also expected to increase, from about 30 a day to about 45 a day, according to Julia Lewis, DVM, director of the veterinary facility.

Special features of the new hospital include digital equipment, natural lighting and the overall increase of size to accommodate additional prep and surgery tables. The hospital will also focus on education. The public can watch selected surgeries in the Medical Center Learning Alcove.

In addition to incorporating cutting-edge animal care, HSSV wanted to create an environmentally sustainable campus. Some of the green-building features, which will allow HSSV to spend less on operational costs and more on the animals, include: An extensive onsite solar system expected to generate 40 percent of the center's energy needs from renewable sources; A kennel cleansing system to ensure proper disinfecting while reducing water use; A reflective "cool" roof to reduce solar heating of the building in the summer and lower air-conditioning bills.

Benninger said that all the new features and services will help change the way the public thinks about animal shelters.

"The old facility, full of cages, gave the message of throw-away pets," she said. "The Animal Community Center raises the level of respect in the community and the pets in our lives."