

# Seeking a home

## Oakland Pet Adoption Center makes strides in pet adoption process

By Jennifer S. McDonald  
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For homeless pets in Oakland County, Rusty's Rendezvous has become a place of hope.

Initiated as southeast Michigan's first permanent facility for public pet adoptions in December, the gazebo on the grounds of the Oakland Pet Adoption Center in Auburn Hills will help many non-profit rescue groups and shelters in getting nearly 255,000 unwanted animals into loving homes every year.

The gazebo was a gift from Linda Wasche, a Sylvan Lake resident who donated \$20,000 to the Oakland Pet Fund in memory of her father, Michael Wasche, who passed away in 2000, and his beloved stray cockapoo, Rusty.

Wasche said it's the first step in getting many strays out of the cold and into a family they deserve.

"The main purpose of the gazebo is to provide a public place for pet adoptions," Wasche said. "We've seen, through adoption events, that the more you can get the animals in front of the public, the better chance they will be adopted."

Previously, public adoption events, such as ones at Freedom Hill in Sterling Heights and the Detroit Zoo in Royal Oak, had to be scheduled in advance and were held for only one day, once or twice a year.

With Rusty's Rendezvous, events can be set up at any time, on any day of the week, for several days at a time, Wasche said.

"The whole thinking behind the gazebo is to provide a place where rescue groups from all over Oakland County can sign up or schedule to use it and stage their events at no charge," she added. "This is the only permanent adoption site in Oakland County where you can go if you have an event any time during the week, during normal shelter hours ... This is an ongoing pet adoption event, and that's what makes it so unique."

It all began two years ago when Wasche and her friends set up the group, Oakland Pet Fund, with help from Oakland County Animal Shelter manager Larry Obrecht.

"I'm very interested in adopting out all the animals we receive at our shelter," Obrecht said. "But it goes beyond that. We have to reach out in the community and find homes for all of those pets. The more we do that, the more people will come in here and adopt our animals."

Since the beginning of the Oakland Pet Fund, Wasche and the group convinced Obrecht to start CATS, Companion Animals Touching Seniors, a program in which senior citizens receive an adult cat and free cat food and litter while they decide if they want to keep the animal.

Adult animals are usually the hardest to place, and they hope to start a program with adult dogs as well.

"CATS is a program where a group of volunteers go to senior centers for the purpose of adopting," Obrecht said. "We could be out there a lot more, but it's a staffing issue."

Operated by a board, the Oakland Pet Fund has received tax-exempt status and recently created an Internet newsletter, Fur-e-tails, to help link all rescue groups and shelters in southeast Michigan.

The group hopes to find homes for all homeless pets and eventually institute a no-kill policy in Oakland County by the year 2010, Obrecht said. This national endeavor, No More Homeless Pets, includes more than 100 shelters and rescue groups in the country. It will be a hard undertaking, with 254,897 dogs and cats taken in by Michigan animal shelters in 2004, state records say. More than half of that number were euthanized.

Currently, there are close to 125 cats at the Oakland County Animal Shelter and between 60 and 70 dogs, Obrecht said. There are even rabbits, hamsters and birds, all ready for adoption.

"Our goal is to adopt out, not euthenize, any adoptable pets," Obrecht said. "The numbers vary by organization, and quite frankly, our numbers are pretty darn good. We adopt out a lot of animals."

A Valentine's adoption event is being planned for Feb. 11 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Oakland County Pet Adoption Center and Rusty's Rendezvous, 1700 Brown Road off M-24 in Auburn Hills.

For more information, call (248) 391-4100 or visit the Web site [www.co.oakland.mi.us/anmlctr1](http://www.co.oakland.mi.us/anmlctr1). To sign up for the electronic newsletter on animal care and adoption in southeast Michigan, e-mail your name to [fur-e-tails@oaklandpetfund.org](mailto:fur-e-tails@oaklandpetfund.org).

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