



Staff photograph by TONI FINCH KELLAR

The New Milford Animal Welfare building will provide a home for animals like Charlie Girl, a labrador mix at left, and Betsy, a dalmation

cross, shown with Animal Welfare co-chairmen Margaret Giovannone, left, and Suzanne Barber with building committee chairman David Jalbert.

New Milford Animal Welfare Society finds home for itself

By Eileen FitzGerald
STAFF REPORTER

The kindness of some New Milford residents is overcoming the negligent ways of their neighbors.

The Animal Welfare Society (AWS), which finds homes for dogs and cats abandoned by their owners or lost, is completing its first home using funds donated by area residents.

Margaret Giovannone, co-chairman of the 25-year-old organization for the past 10 years, said the 3,000-square-foot facility being built at the corner of Dodd and Pickett District roads will help AWS to continue its goals of finding permanent homes for animals.

"When the society was formed 25 years ago, there was no pound or facility for stray dogs in New Milford," said Mrs. Giovannone Monday.

"Now there is a state-run pound but it only houses the dogs for seven days and then has to destroy them," she said. "The society exists to rescue the dogs [and stray cats] and place them in new homes.

"We keep them until we can place them. We do not euthanize

them. Some shelters are forced to euthanize, but we work constantly to place the animals so we can make room for the next ones that come in," she added.

AWS - which serves the communities of New Milford, Brookfield, Bridgewater, Washington and Roxbury - has been boarding the dogs and cats it rescues at area veterinarians' facilities as well as at private kennels, according to Mrs. Giovannone, who works with co-chairman Suzanne Barber.

She said the new facility, which will cost in excess of \$300,000 when completed in June, will have room for 20 dog kennels and runs as well as 36 cat cages. It will allow AWS to save boarding costs.

Having all the animals in one place will also make them more accessible to interested families, said Mrs. Giovannone.

"We try to match animals with the family to make sure it's a permanent home. We're responsible about how we place them," she added.

Building committee chairman David Jalbert said he was able to volunteer his expertise in the construction business to help oversee the construction of the new facility.

"Our volunteers get 15 phone

calls a day from people looking to find homes for animals," said Mr. Jalbert, and "there are no funds received from town or state governments."

The funds to run AWS are raised from donations from residents, from bequests left through wills, as well as from money collected by several small sales conducted by the society throughout the year, and one fund raising appeal annually, said Mrs. Giovannone.

The money and the dedication and commitment of the volunteers have made the program a success she said, adding that last year more than 200 animals were placed in homes.

"We have taken on a responsibility to protect the animal's rights. Whatever animals have passed through our hands we have helped," she said, adding that more than 13 million animals are euthanized nationally at a cost of \$2 billion to taxpayers.

The society is mailing out a request for donations this week, called a wish list, to help furnish the new facility, according to Mrs. Giovannone.

Donations can be sent to the Animal Welfare Society, P.O. Box 2, New Milford, CT, 96776.