

Helping Hands Humane Society: Lend a paw

Contributions to build new animal shelter help entire community, not just dogs and cats

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As visitors to the Helping Hands Humane Society shelter know, the facility isn't in the best of shape these days.

Built 35 years ago, the shelter was designed to hold a maximum of 5,000 animals per year. Now, it's taking in 9,000 to 10,000 year after year, and the strain is taking its toll.

Simply put, the shelter is worn out.

You might even say — at the risk of drawing some well-deserved groans — it's gone to the dogs.

Joking aside, though, we wish HHHS nothing but luck in its fundraising campaign for a new building.

Through the drive, announced last October, the organization hopes to raise \$5.5 million to build a new 39,000-square-foot facility to replace the existing shelter. So far, about \$3.6 million has been collected, with contributions coming from individuals, businesses and bequests.

The new building would be three times larger than the current shelter and is designed to serve the community's needs for decades to come. It features an in-house veterinary clinic, a multipurpose room for educational programs, modern ventilation and hygienic systems to reduce the spread of disease, noise controls and other upgrades.

As organizers of the fund drive have noted, it's the first time HHHS has approached the public with a request for a major project.

It speaks well of the organization's operational skills and fiscal responsibility that it has made do this long in the current shelter.

Ideally over the past 35 years, the community would have established better control over the pet population and the '70s-era shelter could have been maintained adequately for years to come.

Instead, the building has been worn down by constant use and overcrowding. Sadly, there's little indication the shelter's needs will decrease anytime soon.

With that thought in mind, it's important to remember that maintaining an adequate shelter helps the entire community — not just those who have lost a pet or want to adopt one. Just think about the problems that would occur if 10,000 lost or abandoned dogs and cats were allowed to remain on the loose every year.

For more information about the shelter, the HHHS and its campaign, call (785) 233-7325 or visit www.hhhstopeka.org.