

FUNDRAISER

Couple to detail plans for Jones animal shelter

Iowa News Service

ANAMOSA — The Animal Welfare Foundation of Iowa is launching a campaign to build an animal shelter in Jones County.

Three years ago, Mike and Nancy Crist of Oxford Mills began a crusade to help the homeless animals of Jones County. The couple will take their commitment to the next level when they share plans to build an animal shelter in Jones County at 6:30 p.m. Thursday at the Anamosa Library & Learning Center, 600 E. First St.

When the Crists began their campaign to help Jones County's homeless animals in 2003, a part-time dogcatcher employed by the sheriff's office picked up stray dogs and delivered them to area veterinary clinics, where they were held for seven days. Any dog not claimed was euthanized.

With the permission of Sheriff Mark Denniston, who is responsible for animal control in Jones County, the Crists began taking a photo of each dog being held at the vet clinics and making fliers to try and find them homes before their time was up.

By the beginning of the Animal Welfare Foundation's second year, the couple had recruited three other volunteers from Jones County: Jane Hilton of Martelle, Denise Koppenhaver of Anamosa and Leisa Boysen of Monticello. These three women form the Urgent Dog Team, taking photos of stray dogs and evaluating their temperament, creating fliers and responding to phone and e-mail inquiries regarding the dogs.

"We have a handful of volunteers, including my husband and I, who volunteer seven days a week," Nancy Crist said. "It's tremendously stressful to try and save the lives of stray animals day after day, while also juggling a job and trying to give enough time to family and personal life.

"It's obvious to our core group that we cannot continue on this road much longer," she continued. "The best solution, and really the only solution, is to build a facility that provides a safe haven for homeless animals for many years to come."

According to Crist, the foundation's president, the foundation's immediate goal is to raise funds to construct a safe place for homeless dogs and cats in the fall of 2007.

The foundation's longterm goal is to create a "Compassionate Campus" that includes a number of buildings and programs dedicated to the animal-human bond, including dog training classes, seminars on identifying and reporting animal abuse and neglect, kids' camps that teach children how to properly care for pets, and a program to reach at-risk children.

"Our goal is to focus on fundraising for the next year and see where we're at," Nancy Crist said. "At this point we are hoping to build a 3,000-square-foot building that provides care for cats and dogs."

The facility they envision will cost around \$250,000, which includes a one-year salary for a full-time shelter director.

For more information on the foundation's shelter project, to make a donation or to volunteer, contact Animal Welfare Foundation of Iowa at wesavepets@netins.net or (563) 826-2208.