

County animal shelter organization forms; land needed

by Sandra Gubel

Two animal-loving women are making “tracks” toward establishment of an animal shelter facility for Sanders County.

In record time, Wanda Thorpe and Erika Jaegers and their board of directors have received 501(c)3 nonprofit organization status for “TRACS” (short for Thompson River Animal Care Shelter). In just 2 1/2 months, they attained the federal and state nonprofit status--quick for a process that normally takes about a year.

The goal of TRACS is to build and manage an up-to-date animal shelter with a program aimed to improve the lives of animals and their care givers, said both Wanda and Erika. Both said they’ve always wanted to care for and shelter animals.

People may recognize Erika as the medical technologist and former co-owner of a local veterinary clinic. She is now a laboratory technician at Clark Fork Valley Hospital. Wanda, another true animal lover, is a resident of the Cherry Creek area who continues her paid job in the pharmaceutical field.

In order to continue to make tracks for the shelter at this point, the greatest need is for a donation of land, or for a purchase of land “at a reasonable cost.” Approximately five acres in the Thompson Falls area is the first major step that needs to be taken.

Wanda has done a lot of research into facilities, and toured the state-of-the-art Best Friends Animal Sanctuary in Kanab, Utah, before putting together plans for the shelter, that she’s scaled down for Sanders County.

In plans that have been drafted, the office would be housed in a structure that would also include facilities for cats, an isolation area, kitten area, and adult cat “cottages” in the back and on the sides.

A facility for dogs would be an octagonal shape, with five interior spaces, five dog runs, an extended play area, an isolation area, a grooming station and entry area. All fencing would be 6-foot cyclone steel with concrete base.

“We don’t like cages,” noted both women, and so plans include isolation areas that would be used when animals first come in for the monitoring for contagious diseases--things like feline leukemia in cats and parvo in dogs. But, because animals are social, wherever possible, cats and dogs would be put together with others of similar sizes, ages and breeds.

TRACS will focus on being a “no kill” shelter, working to address animal issues through education--issues such as overpopulation by providing spay and neuter clinics.

Both Erika and Wanda have met with Sanders County Sheriff Gene Arnold, who said he’s excited about being able to have the animal shelter services in the county, particularly when it comes to abuse and hardship cases.

TRACS comes in place of the previous animal shelter organization, MARS (Montana Animal Rescue Society), in which founders Ben and Rita Doddema have retired from the work.

Unfortunately, in the eight years that MARS was established, a facility was never attained, and the Doddemas ended up taking on a number of animals into their own yard, having to turn away those they couldn’t accommodate.

Commending what MARS had accomplished, Erika added, “We want to do it (what MARS did) on a different level.”

The women believe there is even greater need for shelter and adoption of animals than before, however. “The county is bigger, there are more people,” said Wanda.

Because the shelter will be for the community, it will need the support of the community, said Erika. “We will definitely need volunteers,” she said.

It is hoped that by having the shelter centrally located in Sanders County in the Thompson Falls area that in particular, senior citizens, as well as high school students and residents of some of the programs in the area would be able to provide their services.

“This is something I’ve always wanted to do,” said Wanda. “I’ve always wanted to care for animals,” adds Erika.

Wanda, who is president of the board, has started applying for various grants, and several different animal sheltering organizations have offered assistance, she said. Joining the women (Erika is vice president), are their spouses, Dieter Jaegers and Warren Winter, as well as Tootie Welker, who offers her expertise in grant writing.

To discuss volunteering or issues regarding land, Wanda can be reached at 827-3098. Erika’s number is 827-8282.

