

Pet friendly: Northeast Animal Shelter moves to larger space

By Kristin D'Agostino/kdagosti@cnc.com
Fri Jun 20, 2008, 12:36 PM EDT

SALEM –

(Editor's note: To see more photos and read about the grand reopening, look for the links at the end of this article and to the right of it.)

"Push!" two women shout as Hazel May crouches with tail in the air, struggling to bring her ninth puppy into the world.

The amber-colored stray collie arrived pregnant at the Northeast Animal Shelter last week and she's been treated like a celebrity ever since. Her labor pains began last night, says Michelle Briand, 33, the kennel manager who has been here with her since 6:30 a.m. when the dog began going into labor.

"I rushed right over," Briand says. "She shouldn't be left alone. I offered her water and support and she was really happy to see me."

If Hazel May had come to the shelter two months ago, she would have been turned away because she was pregnant. The animal shelter moved on May 22 from a tiny basement space on Highland Avenue into a former Honda dealership down the street that offers literally 10 times the space. For the first time in their 32-year history, they can accommodate pregnant animals.

"Before we didn't have the space for it," director Laurie McCannon says. "We'd rush the dog off to foster care."

In between pushes, Hazel May sprawls out in the corner of her stall in a windowed room that bears resemblance to a hospital's maternity ward. Staff peer in the windows and point and smile at her crop of nursing babies.

It's not just Hazel who's reaping the benefits of more space. Just a couple rooms over, Crackers, a black and white cat, is enjoying a leisurely stroll around his new digs in a 10-by-8 foot room complete with a small sofa and two climbing posts. At the old shelter, Crackers — who was found abandoned in an old apartment — was prone to moodiness and bad behavior.

"He was cranky and would scratch people," McCannon says. Here in one of two new cat "community" rooms where he's allowed to roam free, Cracker has become much more relaxed. Sure, he shares the space with six other cats, but now his time in the shelter feel less like a prison sentence and more like a night out with the boys.

The community rooms are just one attempt at improving the animals' quality of life — a stroll through the shelter reveals many others. In one room about 50 caged cats doze and stretch to the sound of opera music piped in through the shelter's new speaker system, an effort to help relax the animals. They seem to like it, McCannon says, though the real mood enhancer is no longer having to share their room with barking dogs.

Since moving, "there is a noticeable change in their behavior," McCannon says.

In an attempt to bring the outdoors into the white tiled cages, sunlight streams in through skylights inside the dog kennel. Cats in the two community rooms enjoy sunny windows that are left open to bring in fresh air.

Expanding horizons

The move has proved a good one for employees as well. Cleaning animal cages is much easier since rooms come equipped with hoses, drains and tiled stalls for spraying away the mess.

And company meetings have been better thanks to a new conference room. At the old space, McCannon says, they were held in the bathroom, which, apparently, also doubled as an office space.



David Sokol
Bob and Blondie, inside the Northeast Animal Shelter, show their best puppy-dog eyes.

Northeast Animal Shelter's move to the 13,000-square-foot space at 347 Highland Ave. has been two years in the works, prompted by a desire to grow community programming and accommodate more animals. Donations helped fuel the building campaign.

In addition to helping North Shore cats and dogs, the shelter takes in more than a thousand dogs from shelters in Indiana, Virginia and Puerto Rico — all of which have an overabundance of unwanted, or stray dogs.

They hope to increase this number to close to two thousand in coming years.

They'll also begin offering educational activities for schoolchildren who visit on field trips and providing dog training for owners. And at the new space, there is plenty more room to grow. McCannon points to a grassy expanse of land behind the building where volunteers walk dog several times a day. Someday, she says, the shelter hopes to put another building there to hold more cats, dogs and perhaps even other animals.

"There are a lot of opportunities, there's lots more room to grow," she says.

The Northeast Animal Shelter will celebrate the move to its new home with a special grand opening at the new location, 347 Highland Ave., Sunday, June 29 from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Special activities include an auction, featuring gifts and services from local businesses. The silent auction runs 2-4 p.m. with winners announced at 4:30 p.m. In consideration of shelter residents, visitors are asked to leave their own beloved animal companions at home.

Special guided shelter tours include: Up-close-and-personal time with the animals; "Ask the Vet" and "Ask the Trainer," an opportunity to get questions answered by the experts; Training demonstrations led by local trainers; Face painting; special appearances by favorite TV cartoon characters; raffles and refreshments; and Stuffed Animal Wellness Clinic, in which kids bring a favorite stuffed companion for a checkup by a real veterinarian and receive a personalized wellness certificate.

For information call 978-745-9888 or visit www.northeastanimalshelter.org.

