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Humane Society Silicon Valley turns green with new center

Silicon Valley / San Jose Business Journal - by Lisa Sibley

MILPITAS — Green is gold for Humane Society Silicon Valley.

The nonprofit organization added \$2.5 million to construction costs on its new 48,000-square-foot animal community center to achieve Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Gold certification. Once completed, the 4.85-acre facility in Milpitas will be the first of its kind in the country. The 79-year-old organization will host an open house March 28.

“We made the decision to go green a couple of years ago when we began construction. We thought it was a wise move because in the long term, the operating expenses will be lower,” said board chair Kate Mulligan. “You only get to build a new facility every 50 to 60 years. We wouldn’t have had the opportunity for many decades. It the was right thing to do.”

The organization purchased the Milpitas site, owned by Holland Hitch Co., for \$5.1 million and was the lowest bidder of five. The owners sold them the site because they were consolidating operations and wanted the property to go to the nonprofit group.

The project, which has been 12 years in the making, will end up costing \$25 million, \$20.5 million of which has been raised primarily from private donations through a capital campaign. The group expects to raise the remaining funds by the end of the year.

Humane Society Silicon Valley has been able to complete the construction by financing the project with bonds. It was issued \$16 million of variable rate double tax-exempt (federal and California) revenue bonds through the California Enterprise Development Authority’s 501(c)(3) program, Mulligan said. The bonds are a low-cost financing vehicle for capital improvement projects. The term of the bonds is 30 years.

The group put its current 27,000-square-foot facility on 1.3 acres on the market for an undisclosed price, and it currently has an offer in hand. Cornish & Carey Commercial/ONCOR International is the broker.

“It’s a tough market right now,” said Christine Benninger, the nonprofit’s president. “We were happy to get the offer.”



Vicki Thompson

Humane Society Silicon Valley President Christine Benninger makes use of the new \$25 million animal community center’s dog park. The LEED-certified center will also have a pet-friendly cafe, a pet supply store, boarding and grooming.

The new center is intended to “change the paradigm of what an animal shelter is,” she said, noting that the word “shelter” has been replaced by a community center. Today, an animal shelter is viewed as a warehouse, Benninger said, with a focus on how many animals can be housed. Humane Society Silicon Valley is changing that approach to be about how many animals it can adopt. Benninger said the group’s goal is 10,000 adoptions a year. It is currently adopting about 4,000 per year.

There is also a revenue-raising component to the project. The center includes a pet supply store, pet-friendly café, grooming, boarding and doggie day care. There’s also a veterinary hospital, adoption galleria and cageless habitats for dogs, cats and rabbits, a spay/neuter medical center, education programs, training center, and even a community room that can be rented.

For fiscal 2009, the organization expects about \$2 million in revenue from these programs. It projects the services to grow by 10 percent to 15 percent in 2010.

George Miers of George Miers & Associates, the architect on the project who specializes in animal care facilities, explained how the L-shaped building frames the dog parks at the front of the property and added that the indoor habitats have a lot of light.

“You might never have to turn the lights on,” he said.

He added that the concept was to create an open, bright, modern and forward-looking facility that’s about the present and the future — not the past.

At-a-glance

Humane Society Silicon Valley
Location: Santa Clara
President: Christine Benninger
Revenue: \$5.8 million annual operating budget
Year founded: 1929
Number of employees: 80 employees, 450 volunteers
Web: www.hssv.org
Phone: 408.727.3383

Green features to new Humane Society center

- The solar system on the center’s roofs and carports are expected to generate 40 percent of the facility’s electricity onsite.
 - Onsite bioswales will capture and naturally cleanse rainwater run-off before it enters the water treatment system, reducing the energy needed to clean water supplies.
 - Strategic building placement and extensive use of windows and solar light pipes provide more than 75 percent natural lighting on the interior.
 - Stained concrete floors absorb and retain heating and cooling to reduce furnace and air conditioner use.
 - A high efficiency kennel cleaning system ensures proper disinfecting of kennels while using only 2.2 gallons per minute.
 - Artificial turf in the dog parks eliminate watering natural grass.
 - The center has been built on previously used land, not a greenfield.
 - More than 90 percent of the previous structure on the site was reused in the new project to eliminate waste in landfills.
- Source: Human Society Silicon Valley

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