

Mercury News Editorial

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Humane Society Silicon Valley is living up to its "Silicon Valley" name this week in more than geography. It's launching a new, innovative, ambitious venture at a time when other businesses and nonprofits are hunkering down, and it's introducing a whole new model for carrying out its mission of protecting and caring for animals.

A walk through the newly completed Animal Community Center at 901 Ames Ave. in Milpitas makes it all clear. It's everything the old shelter was not — cheerful and uplifting — and it represents what should be the future for enlightened care of homeless animals.

Most traditional shelters take in deserted animals and more or less warehouse them, placing as many as possible with families and euthanizing those that lack the temperament to be adopted — and sometimes adoptable animals as well, when there's just no more room. Tens of thousands of dogs and cats are put to death every year in shelters.

The Animal Community Center is raising the bar by aiming to not just find homes for animals but also be a great place to learn about and celebrate them. The 4.8 acre site, three times the size of the old facility, includes a community dog park, an animal training center, doggy day care, a boarding and grooming center, a veterinary hospital set up for student observation, a store and even a cafe with human and pet treats.

The goal is to become a community gathering spot — which is key to the society's goal of tripling its current adoptions to 10,000 a year. It has a policy of keeping any adoptable animal until it finds a home.

Architect George Miers, who also designed San Jose's attractive shelter, created a place that looks like fun for humans and pets. Dogs and cats will stay in homelike rooms instead of tiny cages so they can socialize and be better candidates for adoption. Don't miss the "rabitat" for the bunnies that are surging in popularity as house pets. Complete with solar installations and other green elements, the facility cost \$25 million, of which the Humane Society has raised \$20 million so far.

It's heartwarming in the midst of this recession to see a Silicon Valley nonprofit bring a good idea to fruition. Check it out during an open house from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday.