Written by Mark Jaeger
Wednesday, 30 March 2011 17:31

THE OPENING OF the Wisconsin Humane Society Ozaukee Campus Victoria Wellens Center in Saukville (clockwise from top photo) is being touted as a boon to area pet-oriented businesses. The Saukville Veterinary Clinic has called the community home for three decades. Visiting canine Beauregard greeted customers Tuesday at Pet Supply Port in the Conservancy Court shopping center. The dog training and grooming business Dawgs in Motion has the advantage of being just down the road from the new animal shelter.

Photos by Mark Jaeger

Opening of Wisconsin Humane Society shelter reinforces community's animal business niche

Long before the Wisconsin Humane Society opened the Victoria Wellens Center on West Dekora Street, the Saukville area had become a haven for businesses that cater to pets and their owners.

The grand opening of the 22,000-square-foot Ozaukee County shelter attracted throngs of people Saturday, and that spill-over was felt by a handful of businesses.

Few communities the size of the village have so many ventures serving one sector of the business world.

Saukville Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Stacey Frey noted that five of the organization's members are businesses that cater to the needs of pet owners.

The most recent addition to that roster is the Humane Society itself.

Frey said the Chamber hasn't specifically attempted to recruit pet businesses, but termed the symmetry "interesting."

"I don't know that it is at all related, but I think it is great to have so many pet businesses. They are all a bit different, and having them so close should help each other," Frey said.

"I haven't had a chance to tour the new building, but I know it will be a great asset for Saukville. People treat their pets like children … with spa treatments, grooming, clothing, etc. These businesses are probably benefiting from how we all treat our pets these days."

The impact of the opening of the $6 million, state-of-the-art animal shelter was immediate for many business.

"Since the shelter opened on Saturday, we have already had six or seven clients come in to have their newly adopted pets checked over," said Judy Steinert, practice manager for the Saukville Veterinary Clinic.

Although Paul Shepherd has had the veterinary practice in the community for about 30 years, Steinert said, the Humane Society shelter has created a new buzz.

"I know our clients are all excited about the shelter opening and the opportunities it presents. The vet staff has been invited to a private tour of the facilities next month," she said.

"There will be a learning curve involved as we become familiar with what services the Humane Society offers, but everyone is excited to be working with them."

Location is one of the greatest assets the new shelter has going for it, Steinert said. The building replaces a cramped facility in what was once the concession stand for the 57 Outdoor movie theater in the Town of Grafton.

"When clients used to ask us how to get to the Humane Society shelter, we would say, turn down this road and then that road and look for the run-down building," Steinert said. "Now, we can say just go down Highway 33 a few blocks."

The landmark status of the new shelter has not been lost on Sue Richison, owner of Dawgs in Motion. Her pet training and boarding business is located a few blocks away on West Dekora Woods Boulevard.

The business has been in the Saukville Business Park for three years.

"It wasn't until after we opened that we learned the Humane Society was looking into building on

the property at the corner of Highway 33," Richison said.

"Up until this point, when people asked us where we are located, we would say, 'Look for the water tower.' Now, we can say we are just down the road from the new shelter."

The proximity of the shelter is likely to be appreciated by her clients, too.

"There are times when our clients lose a family pet, and it will be easy for us to direct them to the shelter now to look into adoption, because it is so close." Richison said.

She said the shelter has already meant exposure for her business.

"The shelter is beautiful and it is drawing people from all over," said Richison.

"I know we had people stop at our business from Sheboygan and Cedar Grove on Saturday who were in town to see the new shelter."

Richison said she stopped at the shelter briefly to deliver some requested supplies on Saturday, but had to hurry back to her business, which was also crowded.

Jennifer Eurich, owner of Pet Supply Port in the Conservancy Court shopping center, has rolled out the welcome mat for the shelter.

"We have been running an ad offering a free self-serve dog wash and tag for every pet adopted at the shelter. We had two people come in with puppies on Saturday," Eurich said.

Similar cross-promotions are expected in the future, she said.

When word spread that the Humane Society was building in Saukville, Eurich admitted she had reservations.

"I was concerned that they were going to have a store in the building and would be taking business away from us. Then I learned that was not the plan, and I am delighted to have the shelter in town," she said.

"I hope the Humane Society will increase our business and put more animals out there for us to serve and support. It is definitely a good thing for us."