



Shake on it: Theresa Gattung, left, and Kerry Prendergast with eight-week-old pup Griffin at the old hospital site. Picture: PHIL REID

Deal 'a match made in heaven'

NATHAN BEAUMONT

WELLINGTON'S former Chest Hospital is to become a multimillion-dollar pet palace, with the SPCA being given the green light to shift in.

SPCA national president Peter Mason said the charity, which cares for more than 5000 animals each year, had been looking to shift from its cramped Newtown headquarters for several years.

"At the moment we have cats and birds in cages next to each other and cats in cages in the offices with staff, so obviously we need to move."

Former Telecom head Theresa Gattung has been hailed as the driving force behind the SPCA securing the site, helping to raise more than \$1 million so far for the \$7 million project. The SPCA, which hopes to open the new premises on the city side of Mt Victoria in March 2010, was given permission from Wellington City Council to lease the site in Alexandra Rd for 20 years, with four 10-year rights of renewal.

The council, which owns the building, has refurbished the exterior, including re-



Waifs and strays **A15**

roofing and repainting in its original red, green and brown colour scheme.

The SPCA will be responsible for fitting out the interior and is putting together "grand plans" for the building.

It intends to spend about \$7 million getting the interior up to scratch, but it will have to go cap in hand to the public to reach its funding goal.

Calling on her corporate contacts, Ms Gattung has already held a fundraising dinner at the Chest Hospital site, raising more than \$1 million by selling off naming rights

for various parts of the building. "I have never had time to help out, only make donations, but when I heard about the project and saw the site they wanted, I couldn't help but jump on board," she said.

"It's a wonderful facility and I wanted to do everything possible to secure the site.

"The current facilities in Newtown are so depressing. The staff do a great job, but they are very limited by what they can do so this pet palace will be brilliant."

The renovated premises will have an education wing that will allow up to 160 schoolchildren to visit at a time to learn about animals and how to look after them.

The charity will also be able to perform more veterinary operations because there will be additional theatres.

Wellington Mayor Kerry Prendergast, a former nurse at the Chest Hospital in the 1970s, said the deal was a match made in heaven. "They are great tenants and we are happy to help them out."

SPCA fundraising and marketing executive Lisa Snow said about \$3.5 million had been raised so far and the organisation was confident it would reach its goal.

Where waifs and strays come first

THE SPCA'S headquarters in Newtown has been bursting at the seams for 10 years.

Handling more than 5000 animals a year, the charity has been forced to put the caged animals in any spare space it can find, even in offices with the staff. Cats are put in cages next to birds, and dogs are forced to share kennels and have limited space to exercise outside.

SPCA fundraising and marketing executive Lisa Snow says the neighbours are also tiring of having the charity in its Newtown premises.

"Sometimes the neighbours throw stones on the roofs of the dog kennels because they bark so much, which is obviously quite scary for the dogs, but we can understand the neighbours' frustration."

SPCA national president Peter Mason sums up the Newtown premises, which has been the charity's home since 1984, in one word — "awful".

"There's no other way to explain it. The facilities are awful for both animals and staff and we just couldn't stay here much longer. We had to move."

What is the new site like?

Mr Mason says the SPCA has "hit the jackpot" with the former Chest Hospital site in Alexandra Rd.

"We couldn't have got better facilities. It is a dream come true, it really, really is. It will allow us to do everything we want and more. I don't think I've stopped smiling since we were given the green light because it was so hard to find a suitable site."

The SPCA was given permission from the Wellington City Council to lease the site for 20 years, with four 10-year rights of renewal.

Once renovated, the premises will have about three times as much space as the Newtown building, a bigger outdoor area for the dogs and an education wing that will allow up to 160 school children to visit at a time to learn about animals and how to look after them.

Additional theatres at the complex also mean the charity will be able to perform more veterinary operations.

How much money does the SPCA need?

The organisation plans to spend about \$7 million getting the building's interior up to scratch and will rely heavily on the public to meet its funding target.

Ms Snow said about \$3.5 million had been raised so far and the charity knows

▶ THEY SAY

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Wellington SPCA cares for about 5000 animals each year on a \$3 million budget:

- 54 per cent are cats and kittens.
- 33 per cent birds and wildlife.
- 13 per cent dogs and puppies.

there is a long way to go. "But we are confident we will get there — we have to get there because we have no choice. The public has been very generous over the years, but we hope they can dig a bit deeper and give us some more money."

Wellington SPCA chief executive Judi Weir said she was humbled by the generosity shown by the public so far and is confident it will continue.

"Their faith in Wellington SPCA's dream to have a world class facility for animals and a wonderful destination for the community and its visitors demonstrates huge loyalty to our work saving lives of precious animals."

How will the money be raised?

As well as public donations, Ms Snow says the SPCA will rely on grants from trusts, such as the Lottery Grants Board, and a "tiny bit of corporate support".

"The economic climate means we don't expect to get much from the corporate sector, but even if we can get a little bit it all counts."

She says grants are tough to get because they are oversubscribed, but she is confident the organisation's applications will strike a chord.

"We are only asking for a one-off grant. It's not like we want money each year for the next 10 years. We are opti-

mistic the trusts will support us." The key to getting the public to part with their money is to ensure they understand the importance of the project.

"The SPCA has to move, we have no choice, the facilities in Newtown are awful, not just for the animals but staff too. For the sake of the animals we need to get this money, so it's about convincing the public about the importance of this project."

The SPCA's secret weapon so far has been businesswoman Theresa Gattung, whose business contacts have drummed up more than \$1 million in funds.

A supporter of the charity for more than 20 years, Ms Gattung says she couldn't turn down the chance to help when the SPCA came calling.

"They are a brilliant organisation and I really wanted to help as much as I could. In the past I have only been able to make financial contributions, but with this project I really wanted to take the bull by the horns and get heavily involved."

She organised a fundraising dinner at the Chest Hospital site, which included selling off naming rights for various parts of the soon-to-be headquarters, raising more than \$1 million.

On a personal note, Ms Gattung says the SPCA plays an important role in the lives of many people. Her "deaf, old" cat with "buggered kidneys" died recently but she has a blind cat to fill the void.

"I love animals so much because they add colour to our lives and teach us so much. I remember seeing a dog that was skin and bone when it arrived at the SPCA but six weeks later he was so healthy and friendly. The SPCA does a brilliant job."

At the new place, not only will the animals will be the winner, but the customers too. "The facilities in Newtown are so depressing, but the new place will be brilliant and much more friendly."