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- A hallway of cat condos is part of the new Blue Earth County Humane Society's new facility. John Cross



## **Open house on Saturday**

By Robb Murray Free Press Staff Writer

MANKATO — Welcome to the pooch palace.

The Blue Earth Nicollet County Humane Society opened the doors of its new shelter Thursday for media tours.

A public open house is set for Saturday. If you go, however, be forewarned.

Those odors you've come to expect around the cat cages? Gone. That eerie feeling you got when you entered the cellar where the dogs were kept? You won't feel that anymore. And those apologetic looks on the faces of the staff and volunteers? Replaced with proud smiles.

How can they not be? Their new site is the Taj Mahal of animal shelters. Cats will live in "cat condos" and plenty of furniture to scratch and climb. Dogs will have bigger kennels, each with access to the outdoors.

The \$1.2 million venture is finally ready. Basically. There are a few loose ends to tie up, but if all goes well, the animals will move from the rundown Madison Avenue locale to the new site just off Highway 169 in about 10 days.

It is one of only five LEED-certified shelters in the nation, Humane Society officials say. LEED-certification requires strict adherence to standards that require high energy efficiency and little pollution.

A quick tour:

Upon entering the shelter visitors will first notice the cat condos. Instead of cages, cats will reside in rooms with sliding glass doors and a window view. Up to five cats will occupy a condo, and each condo can be sponsored with a \$10,000 donation to the shelter.

Dogs get a substantial upgrade as well with large kennels with outdoor access. And each individual outdoor area has access to a communal outside area where dogs can play together and volunteers can play fetch or other games with them.

Inside, there is a community room that will be available to community groups. A dog-wash station will be available for community use as well, although using it will probably require a donation of \$5 or \$10.

The shelter's plan is to have a stable of veterinarians who will come in regularly to perform spayings and neuterings for cats and dogs. When they come, they'll be able to perform those procedures in the shelter's surgery suite.

One of the most significant features of the shelter, Humane Society officials say, is how many things they didn't have to pay for.

Carpentry work was donated by a local contractor. They found used doors at the Verizon Wireless Center, used office furniture at Fireside Bank in Minneapolis. Immanuel St. Joseph's Hospital donated sinks. Windows came from a nursing home in Lake Crystal. Overheard Door Company donated and installed a garage door. Wired World donated equipment and labor for computer networking. Spectrum Systems donated and installed a fire-alarm system. And there were others.

"The community has totally come together to do things for the shelter," said Board Member Katherine Nelson. "And we want this community to be proud of it."

BENCHS hasn't tallied everything up. But the things they haven't had to pay for, they say, may total up to \$200,000.

The new place also offers another "luxury" they didn't have with the old shelter: storage.

"The old shelter," said volunteer Don Nelson while standing in the garage/storage area, "could just about totally fit in this room."