

Profiles in Giving-Sanctuary and Home for Good Capital Campaign Update by Mary deManbey

There can be no doubt the past few years have been extraordinarily challenging for most non profit organizations. Fortunately, thanks to its loyal base of support, Our Companions (OC) continues to make progress on its Home for Good Capital Campaign to build New England's first pet rescue center and domestic animal sanctuary.

OC launched the demolition phase of the capital campaign in 2007; before sanctuary construction could take place, the 43-acre site needed significant work, including the demolition of massive chicken coops and removal of debris. It was at this crucial point that OC received a major gift of \$100,000 from Charlotte Kinlock and her wife, Anne Stanback. Without their leadership, OC wouldn't have been able to clear the site and begin the next phase of the capital campaign and ultimately build the sanctuary.

In late 2008, OC obtained approval of its engineered site plans from the Town of Ashford's Inland Wetland Commission. But when the financial crises began in late 2008, OC braced for the worst, and out of necessity, temporarily put their campaign plans on hold. They focused their fundraising mostly on operations (the Companions Fund), which sustains the day-to-day work of the organization to include the care of over 1,300 animals (annually) through its rescue operations.

Then in late 2009, recognizing that the economy was at least no longer in freefall, OC began actively seeking capital campaign pledges. Since then, OC has raised well over \$400,000 in cash and pledges, thanks in large part to the generosity of OC board member, Valerie Friedman, and her sister, Lida Orzeck, who put forth a \$100,000 challenge pledge. OC swiftly met and surpassed this challenge and is nearly halfway toward its phase-one goal of \$1,000,000.

"Everyone involved with Our Companions shares the vision of seeing the sanctuary become a reality," said Friedman. "Animals in need cannot wait for the economy to fully recover, and neither can we. My sister and I made the \$100,000 challenge gift so that others who share our commitment will step forward with gifts of their own to move the project ahead. Working together, we can turn the promise of the sanctuary into a reality in the near future."

Dream to Reality

The sanctuary will be built in two phases. The first phase will include the building of the main rescue cottage - a two-level cottage where rescued animals can be cared for and rehomed. "We want to get a feel for the design by operating on a limited capacity initially," said Susan Linker, CEO of Our Companions. The second phase, including 16 cottages and an education center, is anticipated to cost nearly \$4.5 million dollars.

Linker wants to assure the community that the dream is very much alive. "We've had to adapt while making sure our current animal rescue programs were stable, because now, even without the sanctuary, we're saving hundreds of animals every year through our progressive and unique, life-saving programs," said Linker.

“We are committed to making this happen,” she said, “and we will continue to be aggressive in our fundraising. Valerie and her sister are an inspiration for others to join them in this effort.”

To learn more about the Home for Good Capital Campaign, please contact Susan Linker at (860) 242-9999, ext. 301, or e-mail SusanL@ourcompanions.org.

On Giving

I thought about it—I really did. Do I want to donate more than I normally give to Our Companions, particularly knowing they are probably hurting during this economic downturn? Or, do I want to play it safe? I have a decent job, but these days who knows how long it will last. And besides, there are a lot more people who make more money than I do, or who come from a double income household. And maybe I would enjoy returning to France this summer to study music. And maybe I need a new outfit from Chico’s because I’ve outgrown all my other expensive clothes.

But four million dollars is needed to build the sanctuary! Will this really happen? And how can my donation make a difference? Small donations become big donations collectively. Dreams become reality only because people who believe it will happen make it happen.

I look at Tigger, my rescue cat. He gazes up at me with those bedroom eyes, lying stretched out on his back, showing off a furry belly that obviously belongs to the handsomest cat alive (or so he thinks). Could any creature love me so much?

There is no doubt. The Chico’s outfit can wait—Tigger and his kind can’t. I make out a check for more than I normally would contribute. It felt great.