

Changes coming to Humane Society

Three new administrators restructuring agency; new building to open soon.

By **TONY BRITT**

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The Lake City-Columbia County Humane Society has hired three new administrators as it works toward restructuring the agency and preparing for future growth.

Robin Tobak Ward will serve as the executive director for the agency. She is replacing Humane Society spay/neuter clinic facility manager Tom Barritt, who recently retired. She has been in the position since June 30.

Brian Hogue-Pua will serve as the director of finance and shelter operations. Hogue-Pua has been with the Humane Society for more than five years, performing some of those duties, but was recently officially promoted to the position.

Jordan Regar will work as the agency's community development manager. She was hired and began working on Monday, Aug. 3.

"The Lake City-Columbia County Humane Society Executive Board of Directors did all of the interviewing for the new position knowing that Mr. Barritt was going to be retiring and I was hired for the job by the board," Ward said. "... We're working on restructuring everything in the meantime, building our new James Montgomery building and the actual metal building should go up in early September. It's a little behind my schedule because of covid, but if we can get it done by December, then I'm happy."

The James Montgomery Animal Wellness Center will house a variety of services for pet owners including a low cost spay and neuter clinic.



Ward

wellness packages. The organization is also looking to purchase x-ray and ultrasound equipment.



Hogue-Pua

across the street from its current campus on the agency's property.



Regar

She said they've updated their training, are re-writing job descriptions and emergency operations manuals, have purchased new laptop computers, upgraded their website and they're also trying to go paperless.

"The main goal is to let the community know that we're growing and we're transparent," Ward said.

Ward said the wellness center is an amazing gift to the community and will allow the humane society to expand its clinic services and provide surgeries, all-encompassing

In addition to the construction of the wellness center, the Humane Society is working with city and county officials to build a dog park

Ward said the administration changes occurred because Barritt was retiring and it was a mutual decision by the existing managers and the board of directors to upgrade the facility's staff and technological equipment.

"Transparency is a very important part of what I'm going to be working on."

Regar said the covid-19 crisis has also impacted the agency's services, which has resulted in more animals being at the facility.

During the covid outbreak the facility experienced a large amount of people who fostered or adopted animals, but several of the animals were returned when people thought they could contract covid-19 from the animals.

In addition, animals have been kept in the facility longer because court cases involving animal cruelty, hoarding and neglect have been postponed indefinitely. The animals must be kept at the facility throughout the entire case.

"Usually it's about a 30-day window with the court case, but with covid, we've had some animals that have been there for almost a year," Regar said. "... We are desperately in need of some growth and I'm really excited to be on the cusp of that."

Once the wellness center has been constructed, humane society officials plan to renovate the older buildings and begin preparing for additional growth.

"We'll continue with the programs that we have right now," Ward said, noting they are applying for more grants to continue the services.

She said they are also working on the possibility of expanding animal control services to other counties.

"We're in talks," she said. "This is the beginning. If we can expand into those counties and copy our process, we could just duplicate it in each of the other counties. Some of the other counties aren't as busy as us."