

your next

Best friend

is waiting at...



**Dover
Township
Animal
Shelter**

By L. Skip Johnson
Photos C2002 by L. Skip Johnson

Rooms with a view, highly adoptable guests.



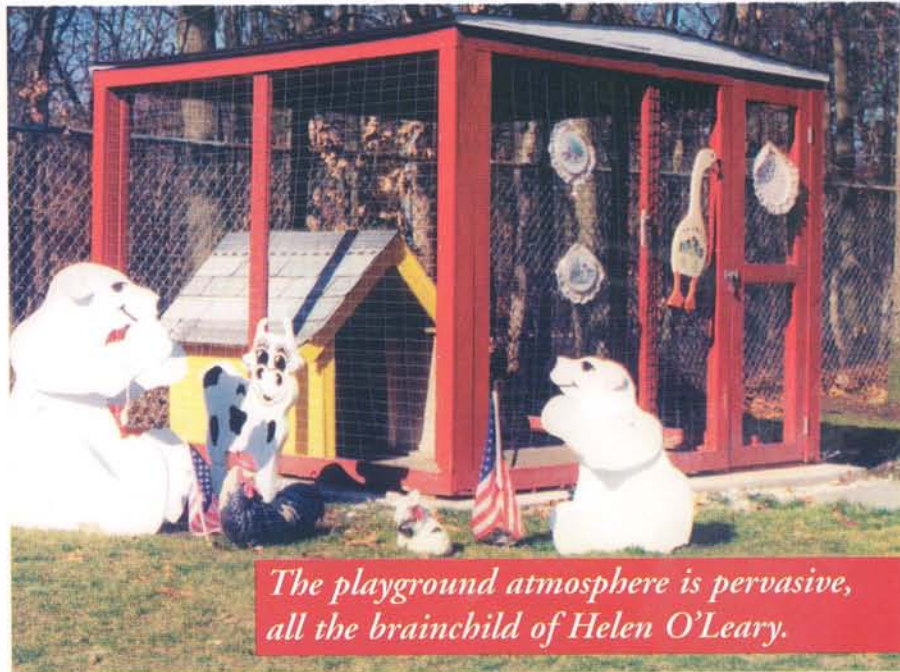
Just a couple hundred yards north of Route 70, off County Route 527 on McPherson Road is one of the most unique facilities of its genre you might ever find. The Dover Township Animal Shelter has evolved into what it is today at the loving hands of its administrator Helen O'Leary. Back in the 1960s a local veterinarian, Dr. Levine, constructed the facility to be used as an animal shelter for the Township. It has operated continuously since then. But, now it is different, very different.

Approaching the facility it appears like all the animal shelters you have ever seen - the block structure, the chain link fence. A blink or two as you get closer and you are asking yourself, "what is that?" A smile comes to your face. It becomes inviting. You hasten your pace, swing open the gate.

Carmen Torrise was busy at work conducting the daily cleaning and scouring of the facility but took some time to show this writer around. His son, George, would do double-duty for a spell. The most important thing to grasp is the concept that was instituted by Ms. O'Leary and is highly praised by staff and volunteers who are a part of the shelter.

The dog and the cat are domesticated animals, not feral wild beasts. As such they possess a different nature - they are cared for. Well, hopefully cared for. When animals are acquired by well-intentioned humans there is an expected chain of events. There is the regular feeding, house-breaking, litter training. There is bonding and the interchange of affection and appreciation. Yes, these are sometimes 'shoulds' and 'supposed tos'. When this does not happen, for whatever reason, things happen to both parties. The human caretaker loses interest and is not able to cope with the true responsibilities of pet ownership.

But, what about the pet? They might and often due exhibit signs of stress, they may become anti-social. They are placed in a pen and given only what they need to survive. This is not how Ms. O'Leary does things. She accepts that the animals are placed in



The playground atmosphere is pervasive, all the brainchild of Helen O'Leary.





a foreign environment and she does her best to counteract that. She wants her 'guests' to be well-adjusted and adoptable.

Look to the right. That large enclosed area with a jungle gym and chairs is the 'kitty emporium'. Yes, the felines are placed there on fair weather days to play or just snooze. The volunteers can sit there also and be 'company'. Look off to the left. Those separate little pens with individual dog houses are for the canine guests to take in some air after their exercise. Exercise? Yes, The volunteers, members of the Friends of Dover Township Animal Shelter, come by and walk the dogs to a large enclosed yard behind the shelter building. A multitude of toys, jumping logs, even a wading pool for those hot summer days await. The dogs are unleashed and played with for a minimum of fifteen minutes.

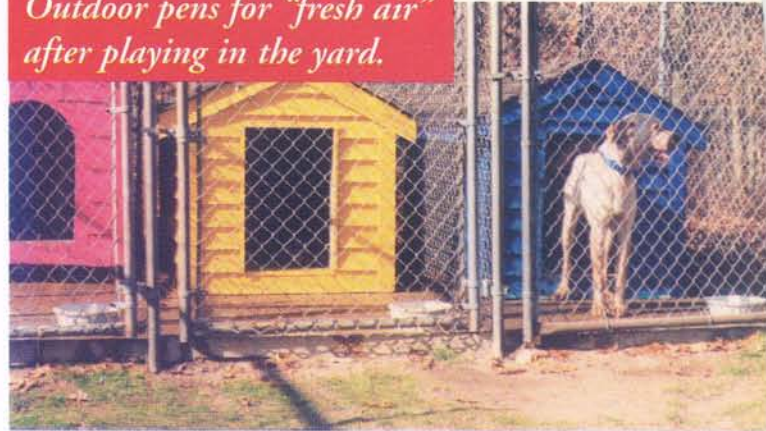
Each departure from the expected was conceived by Ms. O'Leary as another means to make the visitors as comfortable as

concerned with the end result of their breeding policies.


As you look around you see the result of another concern. Larger breeds like the Retrievers and Labradors take more care, more room, more energy. There are subsequently more of them in shelters than there are of the smaller breeds. Though there are numerous reasons for this phenomenon it is unfortunate. Large dogs exhibit affection larger than small dogs. The pet stores should warn potential buyers before hand.

Another concern is the funding of such facilities. It is true that the township has the shelter as a budgeted item, but more is

Outdoor pens for "fresh air" after playing in the yard.



needed for them to continue their important work. In the past there have been school projects geared to help raise money. They have received donations from Walmart, K-Mart, the Sand N Sea Kennel Club, Dover Elementary School, Toms River North and more. As one gazes around at the evidence of their success, the conclusion is that more groups should get involved. Local Scout Troops could perform service work, earn merit badges, complete Eagle projects. Church youth groups, virtually any youth organization could reach out to the Shelter on a regular basis. This creation of Helen O'Leary is for the benefit of those little critters and she should be aided, whether it is the donation of blankets or towels - always needed - or the green stuff.

Oh, there is this great Labrador with sparkly eyes and a tail that will wag a glass right off the table. 



Kitty Emporium. Don't call it a cat house.

possible. This makes them far more desirable when it comes time for adoptions. They are more well-adjusted, user friendly to use a more contemporary terminology. Watch them in your presence. Watch them in their pens. Watch the kitty as he plops on your lap. This seems to be a very successful set of practices.

Some other considerations did emerge, however, that are important, that bear serious mentioning. Each person at the shelter is concerned with the extent of marketing from pet stores and breeders. They feel that, far to often, people buy these pets on impulse and the 'mills' exist only to make profit not being

