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## Friendly to cats, and to cat lovers

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The waft of odor that greets visitors to traditional animal shelters is unhealthy for the cats and a real turn-off for people considering adopting a new pet.

Knowing this, The Cat Depot adoption center in Sarasota is moving next month to a new, 10,000-square-foot high-tech facility that will break new ground in providing a safe environment for cats and a pleasant experience for customers.

Featuring a double-filtered air-conditioning system to reduce cat dander accumulation, and large free-roaming cat pods instead of small cages, The Cat Depot's new home just west of Tuttle Avenue on 17th Street will maximize use of natural light, have epoxy-coated floors and walls to protect against contamination and odor, and include a drain interceptor to minimize cat litter going into the public sewer system.

A dozen indoor pods that can house about 12 cats each will be complemented by outdoor roaming areas, a surgical area for spaying and neutering, intake and isolation rooms, offices and eventually a multimedia room to be used for public education.

"Our goal will be to move the cats in quickly, and to move them out quickly," said Ken Slavin, co-founder of The Cat Depot, who calls the facility "a gift to the cats in the community."

Slavin and wife Linda purchased the property, a 30-year-old building that used to be home to Décor Direct, in February 2007. The couple and local architect Barron Schimberg, who also managed Whole Foods construction, spent more than a year researching shelters that expedite adoptions but are also eco-friendly with features like a high-efficiency air-conditioner and non-toxic paint.

"When you have the opportunity to do something like this, you do it right," Linda Slavin said.

The new facility -- four times larger than The Cat Depot's existing home just south of University Parkway on U.S. 301 -- is already attracting the attention of cat welfare advocates throughout the country.

Shari Timberlake hopes to open a similar facility in Minnesota's Twin Cities area in 2010 and will visit in October to learn some of The Cat Depot's lessons.

"I'm keenly interested in what I see as more of a growing trend toward user-friendly venues," Timberlake said.



*STAFF PHOTO / THOMAS BENDER*  
Founders Linda and Ken Slavin, at left and foreground, tour the new Cat Depot building with executive director Shelley Thayer and contracting manager Dave Turgeon. The adoption center will soon be moving into this new building at 2542 17th Street in Sarasota. The 9,600-square-foot building will house 150 cats at a time.

"If you can put them into a more comfortable environment and allow them to meet you in a friendly place, you do much better in finding homes for these animals."

More than 50 local businesses and more than 190 local workers are part of the Cat Depot project, said project manager Dave Turgeon of Beyond Design. The city of Sarasota even helped out by allowing the Slavins to annex a part of the property that was just outside of city limits.

While the Slavins have funded the building and its renovation, The Cat Depot itself is dependent on donations to cover its \$40,000 monthly operating costs.

Since its founding in 2003, when it rescued more than 260 cats from a shelter that had fallen into disrepair, The Cat Depot has found homes for 2,000 cats and helped another 1,500 through spaying, neutering and medical care.

Shelley Thayer, the organization's new executive director, will soon be kicking off The Cat Depot's first-ever membership drive to help raise additional funds. She said the group's need for volunteers and support will only grow with the new facility, and also predicts a positive ripple effect to the surrounding area.

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