

Old Fella gets place to grow

By Elizabeth Billips Associate Editor



Old Fella volunteers are one step closer to their dream of opening a no-kill animal shelter.

Last Thursday, retired Dunwoody businesswoman Joan Grattan Rowland handed them the deed for 3.25 acres

Those celebrating the occasion were, from left, Grattan and Joan Rowland and volunteers Drucilla Mihan, Vicki Cullipher, Louise Dye, Julie Cole, Richard and Sue Daniels (with Old Fella) and Tom Faircloth (with recently rescued Trouble). STAFF - ELIZABETH BILLIPS

off Highway 25, just south of Waynesboro.

Richard Daniels, president of the non-profit rescue group, called the donation "a dream come true."

Rowland, whose family has owned the land since the 1800s, called it a gift to the people of Burke County.

"The taxpayers of Burke County were very good to me,"

he said, describing a court battle here with the Department of Transportation. "The jury awarded me three times what the DOT wanted to pay me for my land ... the least I could do is give back to the county."

Rowland says he'd never even heard of the non-profit organization until Daniels called him out of the blue one day. Daniels found his name on tax records, tracked him down and pleaded his cause.

In less than three minutes, Rowland agreed.

Now, two months later, the group can hear the first whispers of what they hope will become the first permanent voice for animal advocacy in Burke County.

Daniels is already drumming up donations and volunteers for a three-prong approach toward getting the county's dog and cat population under control.

If his plans materialize, the mission will be anchored by a no-kill shelter and non-profit spay/neuter clinic on the Highway 25 property.

The glue holding the whole effort together will be educating the community.

In addition to reaching out to the younger population about the importance of spaying and neutering, the group is already offering free obedience lessons to all adopted dogs.

Volunteers also plan to begin a therapy dog program which would serve area nursing homes, medical facilities and outreach programs.

While Daniels acknowledges the long road ahead, he maintains the group will get there with the same steady approach they've taken since day one.

"We're not some fly-by-night group; we're here to stay," Daniels said, describing dozens of volunteers and the long hours they've put in. "This land is visible evidence ... we are now bona fide."

KIBBLES AND BITS

- The group was organized last summer after Daniels rescued "Old Fella" from a campground and saw the need for pet adoption services here.
- There are now 35 members and 12 foster families.
- In the last year, they've found homes for 125 dogs and cats.
- Every few months, volunteers rent a van and transport Burke County strays to adoptive families in Massachusetts.
- The non-profit group is looking for volunteers to help clear their new land and begin construction.