

"Oftentimes, (victims of domestic abuse) have to make the choice between fleeing or leaving behind the pets. They don't have to make the choice between staying with their abuser or leaving their pets."

— Meg Rogers, executive director, Cherokee Family Violence Center, on Ahimsa House

Pet protectors

Ahimsa House helps give animals shelter from domestic violence

By Sarah E. Alexander
Cherokee Tribune Staff Writer

When there is domestic violence in a house, pets also can suffer.

But now there is another house where pets can go to escape domestic violence.

Ahimsa House, a non-profit organization based in Alpharetta, is helping to provide shelter for pets of domestic violence in the metro Atlanta area.

Meg Rogers, executive director of the Cherokee Family Violence Center, said she thinks Ahimsa House is offering a great service. She said sometimes the abuser harms a pet as a way of punishing and having control over the family.

She said she thinks the service is something that is truly needed for victims of domestic violence.

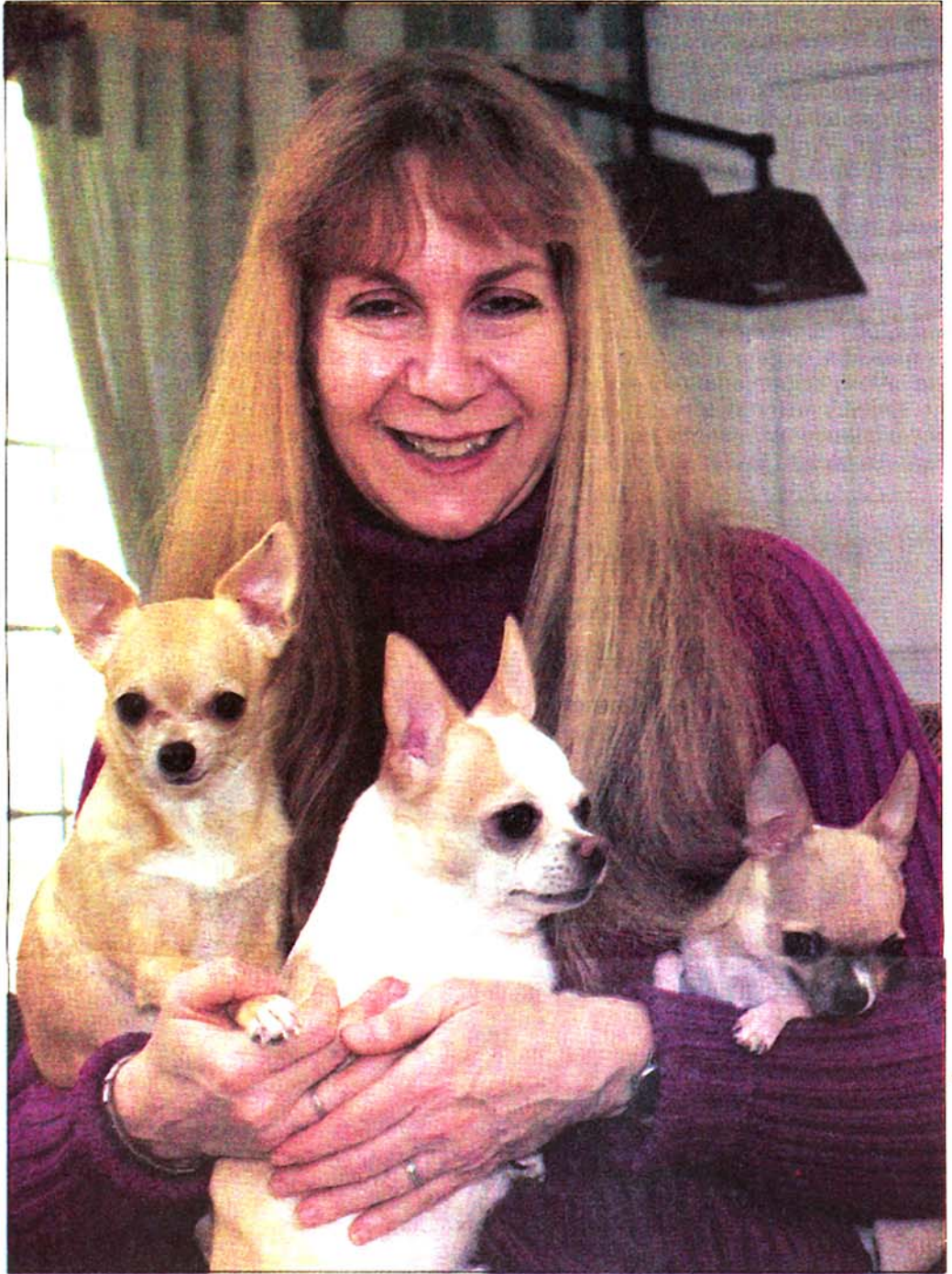
"Oftentimes, they have to make the choice between fleeing or leaving behind the pets," said Ms. Rogers, adding Ahimsa House gives victims another option for their pets. "They don't have to make the choice between staying with their abuser or leaving their pets."

Carole Bodger Bon of Canton is a volunteer with Ahimsa House. She helps find foster homes for the pets and finds permanent homes for the pets if families cannot keep them anymore.

"I like to help creatures that can't help themselves," said Ms. Bon, who has three dogs. "As much as it hurts to see the pain and neglect these animals often go through, it's that much more of a blessing to heal them and return them to health and happiness."

Ms. Bon said most battered women shelters do not accept the pets of families that are experiencing domestic violence.

"That's where Ahimsa House comes in," she said. "Ahimsa House is really a one-of-a-kind source of help for these people as well as the four-footed members of the family, dog, cat, hamster, bird or whatever. They're members of the family in the truest sense of the word."



Cherokee Tribune photo by Bill Cranford

Carole Bodger Bon of Canton, who has three dogs, Pekoe, Louie and Minnie Pearl, has a love for animals that led to her volunteering with Ahimsa House. The nonprofit organization helps provide shelter for pets from households affected by domestic violence.

Emily Christie of Cumming, founder and president of Ahimsa House, said the organization has been officially in operation since June. She said so far they have helped pets in about 41 domestic violence situations.

"We're the only one of our kind in Georgia," said Ms. Christie, who said a personal experience with domestic violence led her to create the organization.

She said several women have told her they would not have gone to a shelter

if there had not been a place for their pets.

"We have definitely helped out those people quite a bit," she said. "We're filling a really big need."

Ms. Christie said they currently provide shelter for dogs and cats but want to help horses, too.

"Any kind of animal that needs to seek safety we'll help them," she said, adding the organization also helps to spay and neuter animals. "I do believe something bad like

death or injury would happen to some of the animals if we hadn't been there to help."

Ms. Bon said she thinks the organization is providing a wonderful service.

"Ahimsa House's heart is both with the animals and the people who love them," she said.

For information about Ahimsa House, visit the Web site at www.ahimsa-house.org.

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