

Safe haven for pets, peace of mind for their owners

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The young wife had learned how to defend herself against her husband's fists. And she'd managed to shield her toddler from his violent temper. But when he angrily kicked the family pup across the kitchen floor, almost taking its life, there was no denying the danger.

"Next time, it wouldn't just be the dog," she thought.

A women's shelter would open its doors to mother and child, but what about their beloved pet, a likely target of her husband's revenge?

"Mommy! Mommy!" her daughter sobbed, "We can't leave Jingles behind."

Domestic violence crisis lines in Georgia annually receive more than 72,000 calls. Yet, while one study reports that concern for a beloved companion animal's welfare prevents or delays more than 50 percent of battered individuals from escaping domestic abuse, most family shelters cannot accept animals due to facility restraints and legal issues.

"We've got to let these families know there's help," says Emily Christie, the Cumming resident who founded Ahimsa House, Georgia's first and only shelter for the animal victims of domestic violence.

"Unless they know there's an option, they will continue to put their lives at serious risk," said Christie, whose own flight from violence motivated her to launch the nonprofit group. Inspired by the language of peace advocate Mahatma Gandhi, "I called it Ahimsa House because ahimsa means nonviolence and it seemed



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like a good name for a no-kill animal safe-house."

"As a pet lover and an advocate for domestic violence victims, I was thrilled when I learned about Ahimsa House opening," said Nancy Grigsby, executive director of Atlanta's Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, an alliance of 60 like-minded organizations. "Not only will they save the lives of many pets, they will help save the lives of many victims and their children, who can now flee an abusive family member.... Without the availability of a safe and reliable place to put their pets, many victims would be further trapped in the abuse. Ahimsa House opens doors for victims and brings safety to family pets as well."

"They have provided a valuable service to battered women," said Lee Ann Baumann, executive director of Forsyth County Family Haven, in Cumming. "A

lot of women need to leave their homes but they don't want to leave their pets behind because they're part of the family and they're in a dangerous situation. They might bring them to a vet for a while, but they often don't have the money it takes for long-term boarding."

Ahimsa House offers door-to-door transport, veterinary care and all the comforts of a good home to dogs, cats and other pets in its care under the strict confidentiality of its "animal witness protection program." Even their names are changed while in safe-keeping. Ahimsa House has traveled as far as Athens and Cartersville to help an animal in need.

Working with the cooperation of law enforcement agencies, domestic violence shelters and veterinarians, Ahimsa House assures victims that their pets will be cared for while they rebuild their lives. At no cost to

Animal Rescue Fair coming to Alpharetta

Wills Park Equestrian Center in Alpharetta will host the largest pet adoption in Metro Atlanta April 10 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. as Animal Rescue Fair 2005 comes to town.

More than 300 dogs and cats, plus many other animals, will be available for adoption from the 40 shelters and rescue organizations participating. The event is sponsored by the Horse Rescue, Relief and Retirement Fund Inc. and No More Homeless Pets Atlanta.

The event offers potential adopters a chance to learn more about having pets through information and vendor booths on pet care, grooming, pet housing, supplies and pet foods. Live demonstrations will include horse training, agility dogs, dog training, K-9 assistance, equestrian riding and much more.

Admission and parking are free. Animal Rescue Fair 2005 is accessible to all ages and families including a special KidZone that will include pony rides, face painting, moonwalk, prizes and more. For information, visit www.ARF.SaveTheHorses.org or www.AtlantaPets.org or call 770-886-5419.

the family, Ahimsa House provides veterinary care from routine exams to life-saving therapy. (Forsyth County veterinarians Kelly Trogon, DVM, of Faithful Friend Mobile Veterinary Clinic and Tracy Land, DVM, of Project Spay or Neuter performs many of the shelter's spay and neuter surgeries.) A professional dog trainer offers behavior counseling when needed, and visitations and updated pictures of the pets are available upon request.

Ahimsa House animals that need new homes are available through Petfinder.com and at PetsMart events. Included in all adoptions are additional veterinary services and micro-chipping; benefits such as free health insurance, discount coupons and vet visits are often available.

Relying solely on private con-

tributions, Ahimsa House receives no government funding and is staffed only by volunteers. Its main challenges: "We're always in need of donations to keep the shelter running, of more volunteers to provide foster care and of loving homes for the pets who have lost theirs," said Christie.

"We just started a program for people who want to help but can't take a pet home. For \$10 to \$20 a month, 'PawPals' can sponsor a dog or cat. They receive a photo and regular updates on the pet, and know they're really bettering these animals' lives. You just can't do better than that."

For more information about Ahimsa House, its rescue program, adoptable pets and upcoming adoption events, visit www.ahimsahouse.org or call 404-518-5516.