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Riverhead woman on a quest to raise cash for new dog shelter

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Denise Lucas is on a one-woman campaign to bring a new animal shelter to Riverhead Town.

A longtime Riverhead resident and life-long dog lover, Ms. Lucas has already raised more than \$3,000 for a potential new municipal facility in the past few days by going door-to-door asking for donations — and she hasn't even hit up any Riverhead residents yet.

Instead, those funds have come from residents and businesses in Mattituck, Eastport, Manorville, Mastic and Moriches and other hamlets. She plans on eventually making her way to Riverhead as well as hosting fundraisers at local restaurants.



VERA CHINESE PHOTO | In just a few days, Denise Lucas has raised more than \$3,000 for a new Riverhead Animal Shelter. Her goal is to raise \$200,000 by this time next year.

“I have more energy than 10 people,” she said. “When I start something, I finish it.”

Ms. Lucas plans on raising \$200,000 in the next year for a new facility. She has already scheduled an event at the Birchwood restaurant for Oct. 15 as well as a fundraiser at Polish Hall on Nov. 18.

“I’m going to fill every one of these places,” Ms. Lucas said.

Her vision includes shuttering the Youngs Avenue facility and building a shelter in a location that is not near a landfill and where volunteers aren’t asked to walk dogs around an overgrown sump, as they are at the current shelter.

She said she would like to see larger dog runs, space for the town to take in cats and a shelter that can host school field trips.

“If [the dogs] were in a nicer environment they would feel good, look good and be more desirable to families looking for their forever pet,” she states on a flier advertising her efforts.

Riverhead Councilman Jim Wooten said the Town Board is expected to vote Tuesday to set up a trust fund for shelter donations.

No price tag for a new facility has been determined yet.

The Town Board will be managers of the money and once all funds are raised, the town will ask for project bids, Mr. Wooten said. The shelter will likely continue to be run by municipal employees, unlike in neighboring Southampton and Southold towns, which contract those services to private organizations, Mr. Wooten said, noting the town has not made a monetary commitment to kick in funds if Ms. Lucas’ fundraising efforts fall short.

Ms. Lucas, who has three rescue dogs herself, is also hoping local businesses will donate materials.

“This really is going to be a community effort,” Mr. Wooten said.

Though she had always dreamed of running her own shelter, Ms. Lucas didn’t get the idea to revamp Riverhead Town’s facility until a visit there Labor Day weekend. She brought her 13-year-old neighbor, who dreams of one day becoming a vet, to the shelter to become acquainted with dogs that are not purebreds.

The pair were appalled at the conditions of the kennels.

“She was begging me to leave,” Ms. Lucas said.

Ms. Lucas, who works for Otis Ford, a car dealership in Quogue, said she has no desire to be involved in the day-to-day operations of the facility, though she does plan to volunteer.

Ms. Lucas and three friends, who have labeled their ad hoc committee “Concerned Citizens,” are the only one who are now actively fundraising.

Those who wish to make a donation can make checks payable to Riverhead Town and note in the memo that it is for the new shelter. Those checks can be mailed to the town clerk’s office at 200 Howell Avenue, Riverhead NY 11901.

vchinese@timesreview.com

Tags: [Riverhead Animal Shelter](#)

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