

A woman on a mission: Riverhead woman wants to build new dog shelter

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One Riverhead woman got so tired of all the talk about the conditions at the town animal shelter, she decided to take matters into her own hands.

Denise Lucas says her mind was made up by a visit to the "nasty-looking facility" on over Labor Day weekend.

"I said, 'This place needs a makeover,'" Lucas recalls. "Every animal deserves a nice place to live," she said, so she decided to make it her mission to provide it.

Lucas, a driver for Otis Ford (and yes, she's heard all the jokes about a Lucas driving for Otis Ford), says she drives all day long and knows "a million people."

Feeling confident she could raise the money needed to improve the homeless animals' living conditions, she sat down and wrote out a plan. Then she called Councilman James Wooten, the Town Board's liaison to the animal advisory committee.



After meeting with the councilman, Lucas shifted into the next gear. She booked facilities for three fundraisers: Oct. 15 at the Bircwood, Nov. 18 at Polish Hall and "a huge event planned for February at the Hyatt Place," she said.

Lucas said she's already raised more than \$3,000 just by talking to customers on her route.

"I know a lot of people and I went to people asking them to donate, like \$50," said the self-confessed dog-lover.

The checks are made out to the Town of Riverhead "with 'new shelter' on the memo line," she said. They are being deposited into a segregated fund in a town government account, she said.

Lucas said she wasn't sure where a new shelter might be built or how much it would cost. She did make her own sketch of what she thinks it should look like, however.

Wooten said town-owned property would be used. As to cost, he said, "It would have to go out to bid."

"My goal is to raise \$200,000 in the first year," Lucas said.

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