

Napa Valley *Register*

Napa Wildlife Rescue at 11th hour finds new home

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Carol Poole of Napa Wildlife Rescue shows the rural Carneros property slated to become the group's new home.
Barry Eberling

Napa Wildlife Rescue is poised to escape a situation as dire as those faced by the orphaned baby birds and injured creatures that it saves.

The nonprofit cannot stay in trailers at a county road yard along Silverado Trail beyond this summer and had no place to go. No home meant possibly going out of business after 29 years.

Just like a last-minute cavalry charge, a donor who wishes to remain anonymous stepped forward. That allowed Napa Wildlife Rescue to buy a \$950,000, 2.1-acre property with a house, barn and kennel near Cuttings Wharf in the Carneros region.

Suddenly, a group that had always leased space and was in danger of becoming homeless has a permanent home amid a garden spot of vineyards, farms and wetlands. The future has gone from looking dim to brighter than ever.

"It's really a historic turning point for the organization," Board of Directors President John Comisky said.

The one thing needed to make the new home official is a use permit from the county Planning Commission. That means a commission hearing at a yet-to-be-announced date.

Comisky and board Vice President Carol Poole are optimistic. They smiled as much as any new homeowner on a recent day as they gave a quick tour of the property.

They showed rooms in the 1970s-era house where volunteers are to tend to songbirds and baby raptors. They described how the kennels will be for small mammals such as raccoons and coyotes. They talked about having outdoor aviaries.

For these birds and mammals, the property at 4001 Middle Ave. is to be a temporary home until they are ready to return to the wild. For Napa Wildlife Rescue, it is to be a forever home.

"Every day, we feel more certain that this is the place we're meant to be," Comisky said.

Napa Wildlife Rescue has time to go through county approval steps, given the county will allow it to use the corporation yard site through the summer.

"We're just entering baby season right now," Poole said. "We're getting lots and lots of baby birds and animals in every day. It's a really difficult time for us to move. We wouldn't be able to move in right now."

Obstacles can always arise at Planning Commission meetings. A typical one is neighbors who are concerned about traffic and other issues. Napa Wildlife Rescue during the peak summer season would generate about 20 daily trips.

Fortunately for Napa Wildlife Rescue, the nearest neighbor has a similar line of work —

Jameson Animal Rescue Ranch (JARR), which cares for cats, dogs and farm animals.

"I actually told them about the property because I wanted them to be our new neighbor," JARR President Monica Stevens said. "I have a great respect for Napa Wildlife Rescue and a really nice friendship with all of the folks there, particularly John Comisky and Carol Poole."

The two groups could create a kind of animal rescue focal point in Napa County. Poole sees room for collaboration, even though one cares for wild animals and the other for domestic animals.

"We're hoping we share volunteers and maybe do some public meet-and-greets — come see what we do," Poole said.

Stevens also sees the potential for working together.

"We share a fence line, but we also share a wonderful collaborative spirit about helping people out," Stevens said.

Napa Wildlife Rescue cares for about 1,200 injured and orphaned wild animals annually. It has operated out of the county corporation yard site along Silverado Trail for 10 years, but must move because the county needs the space in light of an increased road maintenance workload.

It considered moving to the 5-acre Shafer property along Silverado Trail that it owns and uses for pre-release caging and aviaries. But, because the Shafer Sanctuary is in the agricultural preserve, a hospital clinic would not be allowed there without a Measure P vote.

Not having the resources for a political campaign, the group looked outside of the agricultural preserve, at Skyline Park, American Canyon's Clarke Ranch and other possible locations. Nothing worked out.

Then the anonymous donor paid for the purchase of the Cuttings Wharf site. Because the property is in the agricultural watershed zoning area, not the agricultural preserve, a clinic is possible there with Planning Commission concurrence.

"I don't think we could have found a more perfect property," Poole said. "It's absolutely perfect for us."

Napa Wildlife Rescue is hoping that the county will agree.

Go to <https://www.napawildliferescue.org/> to learn more about Napa Wildlife Rescue.