

The Bridge

FREE, INDEPENDENT & LOCAL

Pets & Wildlife

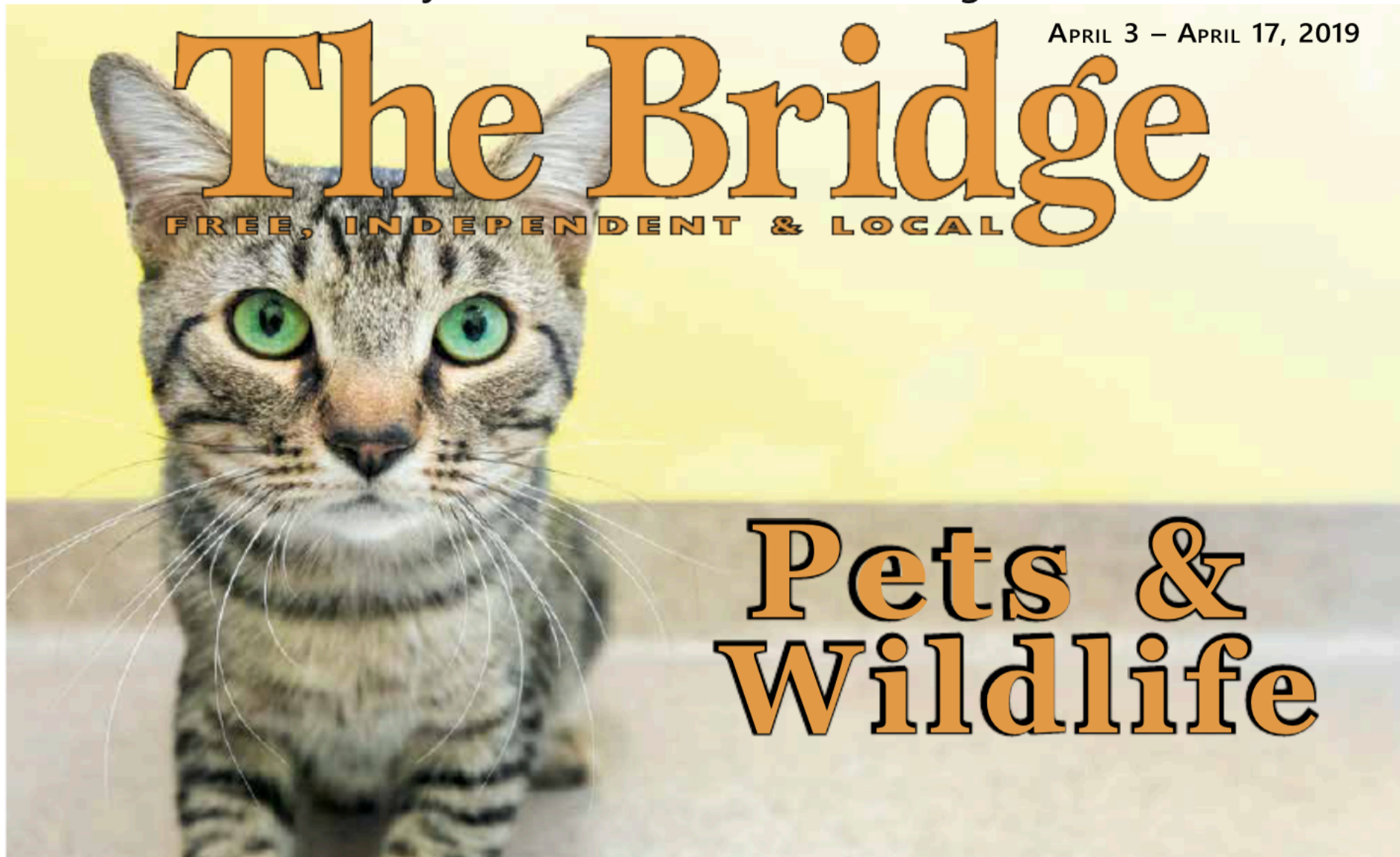


Photo Credit: Cat Cutillo

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New Animal Hospital Revives Downtown Garage Space

By Sarah Davin

The Capital City Farmers Market will soon buzz with locals buying cherry tomatoes, honey, and goat cheese, all while inhaling the mouth-watering smells of hot enchiladas and spanakopita. Even more excited than the humans are the collies, spaniels, Labradors, and more, who arrive in as many varieties as the produce in the market. This year, the Heney lot will include one more pet-friendly amenity to draw more business downtown

The red brick former “Garage” will open this spring as the Stonecliff Animal Surgical Center, thanks to husband-and-wife duo Dr. Dan Kelly and Jodi Kelly, who are reviving the long-vacant building at 58 State Street and also plan to convert the upstairs into The Garage Cultural Center to host a variety of events, particularly culinary ones.

Stonecliff Animal Surgical Center

The new surgical center is the third animal hospital the Kellys have opened in the area; they also run Stonecliff Animal Clinic in Bradford and a satellite clinic in West Lebanon, New Hampshire. The new center, currently under construction, will provide surgical care for

animals. The Stonecliff Animal Surgical Center will also do emergency surgeries during their weekday hours. “If there is an emergency, we will do our best to accommodate them,” said Dan.

One of the assets of Stonecliff Animal Surgical Center is Dan’s impressive amount of surgical experience. He has a special expertise in dog orthopedics and has had clients travel to see him from all over New England, Canada, and abroad. To better understand weaknesses in dogs knees, Kelly conducted a study comparing the knees of coyotes with the knees of domestic dogs and has spoken in Boston at an orthopedic symposium about a novel procedure to repair cruciate ligaments in dogs.

In addition to serving animals, the Kellys also plan to use the space to help seniors take care of their furry companions. Once a week, they will open their space to an as-of-yet unnamed nonprofit to help seniors get their pets the care they need. The industry-wide rise in pet care costs is especially difficult for seniors because it is often at odds with the fixed incomes of older community members.

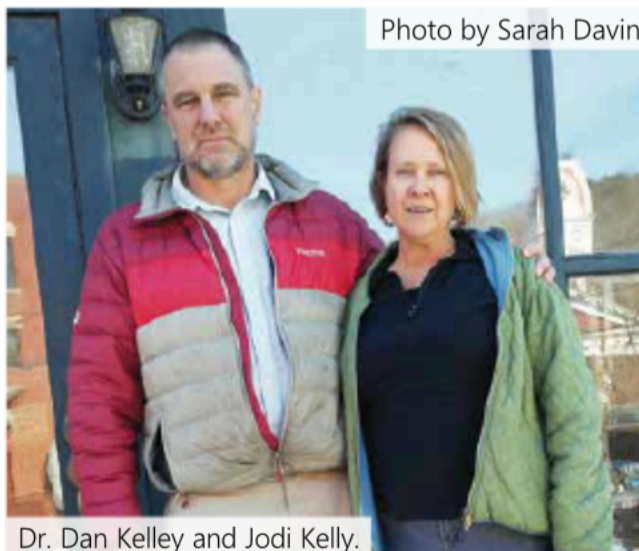


Photo by Sarah Davin.

Dr. Dan Kelley and Jodi Kelly.

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Finding Fur-ever Families

By Cat Cutillo

Laurie Garrison knows first-hand the paw-print an animal can leave on one's life. Hanging above her desk is a framed portrait of her late dog, Mr. Bumpus, whom she rescued in 2005 from a shelter in New Jersey, where she was living and working as an AT&T research scientist.

"I call him my heart dog," says Garrison. "He was really, really a special dog. Obviously, a special dog because he made me change my career," she says.

After adopting Mr. Bumpus, she started volunteering out of gratitude at the shelter, joined the board, and eventually fully submerged herself into a new career as executive director. Now, she holds that position with the Central Vermont Humane Society (CVHS) in East Montpelier, a job that regularly makes her cry.

"It's emotional work. Ninety percent of the time it's good emotion," says Garrison.

She points to another framed photo with a letter about a dog named Morris, adopted 13 years ago from CVHS. Morris died two years ago at age 16, but his owner still visits to reminisce about their adventures hiking and backcountry skiing. "After two years I stopped crying in the forest, but I still cry at home," the letter reads.

"The loss was so powerful because the love was so strong," says Garrison. "It can transform somebody's life. It really can."

But Garrison has also seen a staggering amount of fur-family heartbreak—pets and people torn apart because a new landlord won't allow pets or because a job loss leads to homelessness.

Fifty-six percent of the 1,028 animals CVHS sheltered in the 2017–2018 fiscal year were from owner surrenders in local Vermont communities. Of those owner surrenders, 30 percent said the reason



Mr. Luigi, age 7, has taken up residence in the the front office of the Central Vermont Humane Society where he's been for about six months. He is looking for a home. Photo by Cat Cutillo.

was housing or financial issues. Only 13 percent of the surrenders had to do with animal health or behavioral issues, while another 22 percent attributed it to "other" reasons, such as divorce, human medical issues, or time restraints.

Garrison recalls a woman who became homeless after losing her longtime job and was unable to find another.

"She said 'I realized there was a better place for my cat than living in my car with me.' She was just in tears," says Garrison.

"They bring their animal to us, where they know that their animal will be warm and safe, and we're going to find their animal a home no matter how long it takes," says Garrison.

Another 26 percent of the animals were transferred from rescue partners in South Carolina and Maryland, where dogs and cats were being euthanized for lack of space. Garrison says no shelters in Vermont euthanize for space.

Sixty-six percent of animals arriving at the Humane Society last year were cats and

kittens, 28 percent were dogs and puppies, 5 percent were bunnies, and 1 percent were small critters.

Garrison says it's a myth that people heartlessly dump their animals at shelters.

"People are absolutely heartbroken to bring their animals in," says Garrison. "People come here in tears at the last minute because they've done everything they can. They call all their friends and their family, and they're trying so hard not to have to bring their pet here," says Garrison, tearing up herself.

She wants people who struggle with similar issues to reach out right away.

"Don't get to the point where you feel you're up against it. Call us first," says Garrison who stresses that CVHS provides services to keep pets and owners together.

It costs CVHS about \$805 per animal, per year, to operate, while adoption fees only cover an average of \$135. Abandoning an animal in Vermont is illegal. Still, 18 percent of animals housed last year were strays, predominantly stray cats,

often starving and suffering from flea infestations.

"Cats can reproduce so quickly and so often," she says. A healthy cat can get pregnant at just four months of age, and indoor cats can have up to four litters per year, which illustrates why another 35 percent of animal surrenders last year were due to too many pets in the house, mostly cats.

"We recently had a case where people had over 20 cats in 18 months. It was kind of an accident," says Garrison, who emphasizes to spay and neuter your pets and recommends VT-CAN!, a low-cost clinic in Middlesex open to the public.

Adoption of shy and older animals takes the longest. For example, Luigi is a seven-year-old dog that is a fixture in their front office. He arrived overweight and with a flea infestation. He's lost 16 pounds, and his fur has grown back but remains patchy on one side. The medium length of stay is just 14 days. The longest ever stay was 190 days, a number Luigi is fast approaching at his 144 days.

"Sometimes someone will meet a dog, and it's an instant love," she says. "And sometimes the animal picks the person."


One man was devastated after losing his dog. His wife and daughter fell in love with a hound-mix named Izzy on the website and begged him to go meet her. When he walked in the door, Izzy howled at him just like his old dog once did.

"He said, 'She called me and that was it,'" says Garrison. "They just made such a happy family. She completed their family. We hear those stories all the time."

"It's the best part of the job."

Visit VT-CAN! at vt-can.org and CVHS at centralvermonthumane.org to learn more about adopting and caring for pets.






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