

## **No-kill shelter on hunt for donations Sluggish economy takes toll on couple's animal-rescue work**

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SAVANNAH, Mo. - M'Shoogy's Emergency Animal Rescue, one of the nation's largest no-kill shelters, is turning away 30 animals a day.

The pens that once housed more than 700 dogs are home now to only about 450.

And owners Lisa and Gary Silverglat are looking at more cutbacks.

No longer, they say, can they continue to run the all-animal rescue out of their own pockets.

In 18 years, the couple has spent a sizable fortune - \$6 million earned through several business ventures - to care for any abandoned, injured or abused animal.

But with the economy in a continuing slump, the Silverglats consider their investments worthless. There's enough money left for only one more year - two if the economy picks up.

"It's so overwhelming just to take care of the animals we have, we've just run out of resources," Gary Silverglat said.

Each year's operation, including wages for three part-time employees, costs about \$250,000. Their water bill alone, they say, is \$1,000 a month.

On any day, more than 600 cats, dogs, chickens, ducks, horses, deer, owls, - even a cougar or two - call M'Shoogy's home.

The rescue haven is a 20-acre playground for once-abused or abandoned animals. Scarred cats sun themselves on wooden decks and stone paths, oblivious to the dozens of chickens and ducks strolling in the shade of cherry, plum and apple trees. Barking and limping dogs of all ages and breeds run to chain-link fences to lick any proffered hand.

This is their home until someone decides to adopt them. At least, that's always been the Silverglats' plan.

The couple estimates they've cared for tens of thousands of animals over the years, and adopted out as many as 2,000 during a good year. Since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, though, adoptions are down, closer to about 800 a year.

But the Silverglats say they are in business for those who do not get adopted. They are not the only ones committed to the no-kill concept. There are hundreds of no-kill shelters

across the nation, but most are for only companion animals or a specific breed.

Best Friends Animal Society in Utah is a no-kill sanctuary housing 1,500 mostly companion animals a day, with an annual budget of \$18 million. It started in the mid-1980s, and by 1991, Best Friends was in M'Shoogy's current position, strapped for cash.

"We found ourselves taking in more animals than we could cope with," said Michael Mountain, Best Friends president. "We were running out of funds, which is something we warn people about when they say they want to start a shelter."

To save the sanctuary, the group started a newsletter and a grassroots effort to raise awareness and donations, going city to city and setting up tables outside grocery stores to develop a mailing list. Today, Best Friends has 250,000 members and a budget that is 95 percent donations, coming from across the country and averaging \$35 a person, Mountain said.

The Silverglats hope for a similar resurgence.

Eighteen years ago, they moved to the country to raise Lisa Silverglat's children. That first summer, 13 dogs were dumped on or near their mostly vacant property. So they built fences and pens and organized a dog-walking schedule.

By the next summer, they had 64 abandoned dogs. The third year they applied for nonprofit status and entered the sheltering business.

"We decided to not just take in the animals, but to fix the problem," Gary Silverglat said.

Since then they've built 13 buildings, and later this month they expect to open a veterinary clinic in a converted mobile home - an on-site veterinarian should save them \$40,000 a year and possibly generate some revenue, Lisa Silverglat said.

Gary Silverglat, 62, cashed in his \$500,000 life-insurance policy to open the clinic and hire a veterinarian.

To save money, they've already tapered back the number of animals they rescue - their dog population is about 450, down from the more typical 700.

Running a no-kill haven is more than financially draining - M'Shoogy's is Yiddish for "crazy."

In 18 years, Lisa Silverglat has been away from the shelter a total of 10 days, her husband only four.

"But you just can't not do it anymore," said Lisa Silverglat, 46. "How can anyone be on the face of the earth and not try to make it a better place?"

They believe M'Shoogy's has so much potential, if only they could get help - like sponsors for the Rescue Rangers program, where disadvantaged youths are invited to tour the haven and learn about respecting all life.

The Silverglats say they need volunteers, donations and better laws.

Gary Silverglat worked to establish an ordinance in St. Joseph requiring hobby breeders to apply for a \$20 permit, and be fined if they don't. He also helped the Missouri General Assembly toughen the state's animal-abandonment law.

Sometimes the work is depressing, especially when their competence and motives are questioned.

For example, earlier this year the state Department of Agriculture received complaints that some dogs were too aged and infirm, said Jerry Eber, veterinarian in charge of the Animal Care Facilities Act program.

"I went out there for an inspection, and the dogs are well-cared for," Eber said. "What it came down to was a complex issue. They are a no-kill shelter. When do you reach the point it's time to euthanize your pet? Gary had some animals that in some people's eyes should have been euthanized."

Gary Silverglat shrugged off the incident. "We'll never be ready to give up," he said. "We'll fight to our last breath."

The Silverglats said they wanted to create something that would continue beyond their deaths. The property has been put into a trust for M'Shoogy's, and if M'Shoogy's dissolves, everything will go to the Missouri Department of Conservation.

In the event that both Lisa and Gary Silverglat die, the animals would benefit from a \$3 million insurance policy.

The Silverglats' money came from several of Gary Silverglat's successful businesses, such as a meat-packing plant, a trucking company and a clothing store.

And in the event it all runs out, there's still another life insurance policy that could be cashed in. They might have to stop taking in animals, but the animals they have now wouldn't be abandoned a second time, they said.

"We had no intention of doing this, but just look at these guys' lives," Gary Silverglat said, motioning toward the half-dozen cats sunning themselves on the patio. "Everything is worth it, because we're making a difference."