

Potter League grows a greener animal shelter in Middletown

01:00 AM EDT on Friday, September 26, 2008

By Meaghan Wims

Journal Staff Writer



Justin Bendel and Dustin Brackney, of Apex Green Roofs, Somerville, Mass., plant the rooftop garden at the new Potter League animal shelter going up in Middletown. The building is expected to open next spring.

The Providence Journal / Frieda Squires

MIDDLETOWN — The rooftop garden at the new Potter League for Animals won't rival your home garden. No petunias, begonias or geraniums here.

The 3,000 plants that Dustin Brackney and his crew planted this week on the Potter League's "green" roof are now kind of puny. Even at full bloom next spring, the vegetation will still be pretty scraggly.

But this garden isn't designed to be pretty. Brackney's Apex Green Roofs, of Somerville, Mass., selected the lavenders, alliums, sedums and grasses specifically for their tolerance to wind, heat and drought. Together, the plants will act as a shield, insulating the new animal shelter, absorbing sunshine, reducing greenhouse gases and limiting rainwater runoff.

Plus, Brackney said during a break in the roof's installation this week, green roofs don't have to be replaced as often as standard roofs because they don't break down as quickly under the glare of ultraviolet rays.

The rooftop garden at the Potter League's new shelter is Newport County's first "green" roof and the biggest component in the environmentally friendly facility. The building, which should be finished by the spring, will be a registered LEED building by the U.S. Green Building Council, meaning it is recognized for its "Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design."

The \$7.5-million shelter will be more than twice as large as the current shelter, at 19,500 square feet. The existing 30-year-old shelter will soon be demolished.

The new building has a number of other "green" features, such as a focus on natural lighting and fresh air, recycled building materials, water conservation measures, a gravel parking lot to absorb runoff and a 15,000-gallon cistern to capture and treat runoff water so it can be reused to flush toilets and clean animals' cages.

Potter League officials said they chose to go green for the new shelter because its location, off Oliphant Lane, is on wetlands and close to Bailey Brook, which eventually feeds into North Easton's Pond, a drinking-water source for Aquidneck Island.

Plus, Potter League Executive Director Christie Smith said, choosing an environmentally safe design just made sense. After all, she said, "An animal shelter is an energy hog: We use a lot of electricity and water."

"It's in line with our mission," Smith said of the "green" shelter. "We teach respect for animals. This is a natural convergence of a lot of things we stand for. It's a fabulous facility for the animals and the people."

At full capacity, the new shelter can house up to 188 animals daily, about as many dogs, cats, birds, rabbits and hamsters that now can fit in the current facility. But the experience will be better for the animals staying at the new Potter League and the people working at or visiting the shelter.

"We're really not building for more space, but for a much better standard of housing, a much better standard for medicine and behavior," said Patricia Heller, director of development for the shelter.

The new shelter will feature an open room for obedience classes, grooming areas, common playing areas, soundproof pens, animal-control rooms and private consultation rooms for those dropping off animals they can no longer care for or adopting a new pet.

And, visitors will literally be able to ask "How much is that doggie in the window?" when they spot the pooches in the glass-enclosed pens next to the front entrance.

mwims@projo.com