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New dog kennel is a testament to love; *Levy County Animal Services is improved with new facility*



Levy County Veterinarian Dr. Darlene Esler, DVM, and Bob Echols happily greet a journalist before the opening of the newest improvement at Levy County Animal Services on Wednesday morning (June 17).

Story, Photos and Videos

By Jeff M. Hardison © June 17, 2020 at 8:10 p.m.

LEVY COUNTY – Robert M. "Bob" Echols of Ocala, the founder and president of For Our Friends The Animals, helped celebrate the opening of a significant improvement at Levy County Animal Services on Wednesday morning (June 17).

<https://youtu.be/hiuV1K7u9is>

In this 8-second video, Levy County Construction and Maintenance Department Director Jimmy Jones shows how dogs can be let out to exercise without a staff member having to be in the cage with the dog. He pulls the cord up and then lets it down. The dog handler just pulls on the rope and the clear acrylic (Plexiglas) door opens. This demonstration was just before the grand opening of the new kennels at Levy County Animal Services on Wednesday morning. Jones was the construction superintendent for this project, which was completed for the most part by his team of Levy County workers. Jones formerly served for 25 years in the United States Navy as a member of the United States Naval Construction Battalions, better known as the Navy Seabees. The Seabee nickname is a heterograph of the first letters 'C B' from the words Construction Battalion.

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https://youtu.be/bd6s_kv3l94

In this one-minute video, Levy County Commission Chairman Matt Brooks starts to present the acrylic plaque as a gift to Bob Echols. The text of what is on the plaque is in the story.



Bob Echols accepts an acrylic plaque from Levy County Commission Chairman Matt Brooks.

Echols donated \$272,000 to help Levy County Animal Services build the additional 50 dog kennels. These kennels have central air-conditioning and heat, as well as individualized water service for each dog.

Each kennel has a clear acrylic door that the dog can look outside through, and which leads to an area where the dog can enjoy the outdoors. The structure includes of 6,000 square-feet under the roof.

There are two new 20-foot by 30-foot dog play yards adjacent to the building as well. A puppy room and an observation room are among the added facilities beyond the 50 kennels.

Construction Department Director Jones said there can be as many as 100 dogs kept in these kennels in the event of a hurricane or other disaster, where Levy County residents need to shelter their dogs with Levy County Animal Services.

Dog owners who are considering this option as they make their disaster plans need to check with Levy County Animal Services to learn more about what will be required of them.

This structure, Jones added, includes two separate storage rooms for dog food and kennel supplies, and those rooms are independently climate controlled. All of the lights are LED, he said, which adds to the energy-efficiency theme of the structure.

County Commission Chairman Matt Brooks opened the program by thanking Jones and his staff for building the structure.

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Brooks said the county appreciates Echols' support as a friend of the animals. He presented an acrylic plaque that was inscribed "With our deepest appreciation we hereby honor Mr. Bob Echols with this gift in recognition for your passion, unconditional commitment and enduring dedicated service to the Levy County Animal Services."



This sign shows some of the people responsible for the new kennels coming to fruition. It includes part of the prayer Echols used in creating a name for his foundation.



County Commission Chairman Matt Brooks (right) shakes hands with Bob Echols (left) before awarding him a plaque as a gift. Standing nearby are County Commissioner John Meeks, whose district the structure is in and who was the chairman of the board when this project started, and County Commissioner Lilly Rooks, who is the liaison between Levy County Animal Services and the County Commission, and who is renowned for her work to help animals in Levy County.

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Bob Echols holds up the plaque for all to see.



Before the ceremony, Dr. Darlene Esler, Bob Echols and County Commissioner Lilly Rooks agree to a photo op sought by a journalist.

After accepting the gift, Echols addressed the gathering of people at the celebratory event. He spoke about his motivation for creating For Our Friends The Animals.

The name of this foundation, Echols said, comes from a prayer attributed to Dr. Albert Schweitzer (Jan. 14, 1875-Sept. 4, 1965). Dr. Schweitzer was an Alsatian-German theologian, philosopher,

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organist, and mission doctor in equatorial Africa. Dr. Schweitzer earned the 1952 Nobel Prize for Peace for his efforts on behalf of “the Brotherhood of Nations.”

Following is the prayer to which Echols refers.

A PRAYER FOR ANIMALS

By Albert Schweitzer

**Hear our humble prayer, O God,
for our friends the animals,
especially for animals who are suffering;
for any that are hunted or lost
or deserted or frightened or hungry;
for all that will be put to death.**

**We entreat for them all Thy mercy and pity,
and for those who deal with them
we ask a heart of compassion
and gentle hands and kindly words.**

**Make us, ourselves, to be true friends to animals
and so to share the blessings of the merciful.**

Amen

Echols said Dr. Schweitzer was a great lover of people, animals and of life itself.

“I was drawn to Dr. Schweitzer because of his philosophy of having a reverence for life,” Echols said. “He believed that all life is sacred. All life is precious. All life should be valued. No life should be a means to an end for anybody else.

“We should treat all life as we would be treated,” Echols continued. “And he got that philosophy, and I am sure you can guess, from the love of Jesus portrayed in the Sermon on the Mount.”

Echols said Schweitzer took the love of Jesus and applied it universally to all of God’s creatures. Therefore, Echols concluded, this building is a manifestation of a reverence for life.

“Not only are the dogs that reside here going to get the best treatment and care that we can provide them,” Echols said, “but by being here, they are going to have a marked, better opportunity to be adopted out, and find loving parents – loving owners.

“And, as only a dog can do, once they find those loving owners,” Echols said, “they will give that love back tenfold. That’s what dogs are all about. That’s what a reverence for life is all about.”

Echols thanked Levy County for giving him an opportunity to bring this manifestation of the reverence for life into being.



This view of one kennel shows the clear door that provides a view of the outside to the dog from its cage.

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Levy County Construction Director Jimmy Jones (blue shirt) and County Commission Chairman Matt Brooks review the attic of the kennel structure.

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Levy County Animal Services Director David Weatherford walks by a door leading into the kennels before the start of the program. Joining LCAS Director Weatherford at LCAS are Levy County Veterinarian Dr. Darlene Esler, DVM, and animal control officers Nathan Mercer and Lamar Sears, and administrative assistants Crystal Pruitt and Morgan Anderson. These seven people are the entire staff of LCAS.



(from left) Levy County Commissioner John Meeks, Bob Echols, Levy County Commissioner Lilly Rooks and Levy County Commission Chairman Matt Brooks are among the many people at the event Tuesday morning.

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This photograph includes some of the many people who work with LCAS from such rescue groups as the Alachua County Humane Society. Also in this photo are LCAS Director David Weatherford, Bob Echols, Dr. Darlene Esler, County Coordinator Wilbur Dean, county commissioners Lilly Rooks and John Meeks. County Commission Chairman Matt Brooks and Levy County Construction Director Jimmy Jones.



People walk into the new facility.

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This is not the first or only time that Echols has proved to be a significant benefactor to LCAS. The president of For Our Friends The Animals, in June of 2016, also donated \$10,000 to Levy County to establish The Cat Room at the Levy County Animal Services Department. To see The Cat Room story and photos click [HERE](#).

<https://youtu.be/rvmrmHcIrjI>

In this video, Bob Echols cuts the ribbon to open The Cat Room.

© Video by Jeff M. Hardison (first published in June 2016)

Click [HERE](#) to see the archived story from May of 2019 when the ground was broken for this new facility to house dogs.