

# Chronicle of Philanthropy

April 18, 2010

## Survival Instinct Keeps Animal Hospital Afloat in Tough Climate



Photograph by Greg Mertz

By Emma L. Carew

After completing an \$8-million capital campaign in nine years, Katrina M. Bergman doesn't hold back when summing up the difficulty of the effort: The bulk of the work is "pain-in-the-neck begging," she says.

Yet the cause—rescuing injured animals—makes the effort worth it, she says.

Ms. Bergman runs the New England Wildlife Center, a Weymouth, Mass., animal hospital for sick and injured wildlife.

The capital-campaign money paid for the center's three-year-old facility, which was built to meet the environmental standards set by the U.S. Green Building Council LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) program.

The campaign's largest gift has been 12.4 acres of land valued at \$1.4-million. The donor stipulated that to get the money, the center would first have to raise \$1-million in one year, Ms. Bergman says.

The hospital has a full-time veterinarian assisted by four part-time assistants and student volunteers. Visitors can observe everything that happens through the clinic's windows.

Despite its recent fund-raising success, the Wildlife Center, like other groups, had to cut spending last year. "We're constantly almost going out of business," says Ms. Bergman.

The center trimmed its operating budget from \$1.1-million to \$922,000 and eliminated the equivalent of two full-time positions.

Two years ago the center also began charging for some of its services, such as the care it gives exotic pets in the veterinary clinic, with a goal of producing 40 percent of its income from fees by 2012. Currently about 20 percent of the budget comes from fees, and another 31 percent comes from local foundations. Last year the Wildlife Center had 3,028 donors who made gifts of less than \$100.

Recruiting new donors continues to be a challenge, so Ms. Bergman says she has focused on building strong relationships with people who previously have made gifts. She remembers little details about each donor, such as one who was interested in foxes. She then invites the donor to visit when an injured fox is being treated at the hospital.

Treating injured animals is only one part of the organization's mission. Here, students participate in the center's Clear as Mud educational program by investigating blood samples of clams from local beaches. Ms. Bergman says the goal is to teach students how to think and act like scientists.