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**Dutchess County SPCA and Grace Smith House partner to provide Safe Pet Sheltering
for victims of domestic violence**

HYDE PARK, NY (March 28, 2011) – The Dutchess County SPCA and Grace Smith House are collaborating to help victims of domestic violence keep their pets safe from cruelty, particularly after the victim leaves the home. This collaboration will help to identify resources and offer services so battered women have more options for safety for themselves and their pets.

The Dutchess County SPCA is launching a program called *Safe Pet Sheltering* which offers up to 90 days of shelter for animals in a safe, undisclosed and confidential location while their owner is staying in the Grace Smith House emergency shelter. The Dutchess County SPCA will cover the costs of care for the animal and provide a free veterinary examination. Eligibility for the program will be assessed via telephone intake by calling Grace Smith House at 845.471.3033. This program closes a gap in local services for families.

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According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 71% of pet owners entering shelters reported that their batterer had injured, maimed, killed or threatened family pets. More than half (52%) of women in shelters had to leave their pets behind when they entered the shelter. Fear that their attacker will neglect, give away, abuse or kill pets leads some victims to stay in abusive relationships.

Leaving behind a pet can add to an already traumatic experience and denies victims and their children the comfort and companionship of a beloved pet. Securing kennel or boarding space can be expensive and time-consuming. In some instances, victims must leave home too quickly to arrange safe care for their pets. Offering free pet sheltering in a safe, confidential location can eliminate a powerful barrier to leaving a batterer. The new program will protect pets from cruelty and help keep people and their pets together through a difficult period.

The idea for DCSPCA's new *Safe Pet Sheltering Program* was sparked following a 2009 conference, "The Connection: The link between animal cruelty and human violence", which was sponsored by the DCSPCA, Grace Smith House and the Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse. The training brought together local professionals working to end domestic violence, child abuse and animal cruelty. The conference explored the links between animal cruelty and human violence. In conversations following the day-long session, it became clear that battered women had too few resources to protect their pets, particularly when seeking emergency shelter.

Following the 2010 murder of Linda Riccardulli by her husband Anthony Riccardulli, the Dutchess County Legislative Citizens' Advisory Committee on Domestic Violence submitted a report outlining several recommendations for the county, including exploring options for temporary sheltering of companion animals. The report reads, "The Committee recommends that the County's Domestic Violence Steering Committee engage in dialog with the Dutchess County SPCA to explore options for Emergency Response, temporary sheltering/foster care for pets and for mutual assistance to assure that pets are not pawns nor is concern for their wellbeing an impediment to a victim's ability to escape violence."

Using valuable guidance from similar programs already functioning in Albany and Rensselaer Counties, staff from the Dutchess County SPCA worked closely with staff from Grace Smith House as well as Leah Feldman, the Project Coordinator for the Universal Response to Domestic Violence, and Tom Sisson from the Dutchess County Office of Probation and Community Corrections to develop the new program and identify other tools for victims with pets. Training was provided to staff from both organizations. The DCSPCA received a grant to help support the program.

"Our mission is to prevent cruelty to animals. Animals living in homes with domestic violence are at risk of suffering from abuse and neglect, particularly if the victim flees and the animal is in the care of someone who is abusive," stated Joyce Garrity. She added, "Our goal in working together is to save lives – human and animal. The recent fatalities underscore just how

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important it is for organizations to come together, recognize barriers that prevent battered women from being safe, and eliminate them.”

The Dutchess County SPCA, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit, is the lead agency for animal rescue and adoption in Dutchess County. The DCSPCA is a no-kill shelter with a 140-year history of concern, caring and providing shelter for unwanted, abused, abandoned and neglected animals. Central to the mission of the DCSPCA is the securing of caring, responsible, permanent homes for the adoptable animals in its care.

Grace Smith House is Dutchess County’s largest provider of residential services for victims of domestic violence. The mission is to enable woman and their children to live free from domestic violence. Grace Smith House offers emergency and transitional housing along with advocacy, counseling and education.

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