

# A tale of two website redesign projects

*Hinsdale Humane Society's new site features on animals available for adoption and more*

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Lori Halligan and Pam Salomone remember one Friday in December when they were working on the new website for the Hinsdale Humane Society.

"I had been at Pam's house all day. We had things spread everywhere," Halligan recalled. "We were really working heavy on content. We just kept going and going and going. We just kept working and working and working and it was 10 after 7 and Pam's family was like, 'Bye. We're going to get the Christmas tree.'"

Salomone let them go. "I did kick her out before they got back with it," she said with a laugh.

Halligan, executive director of the humane society, and Salomone, PR special events director, had a hard time finding dedicated blocks of time to work on the new site, which launched last week ([hinsdalehumanesociety.org](http://hinsdalehumanesociety.org)). They've spent hundreds of hours over the past nine months on this project, juggling it with their other responsibilities at the shelter.

"We kind of joke with one another (that) it was like birthing a baby," Halligan said.

The two often worked offsite so they could collaborate without interruption.

"We were at Lori's home office, we were at my home office and we were at McDonald's," Salomone said.

The 5-year-old site was in place when both women joined the organization. They agree it was difficult to navigate and said the technology

supporting it was outdated.

"It was done by a design firm without a lot of input and it really wasn't meeting our needs," Halligan said.

Redesigning and updating the site had been part of the society's long-term strategic plan, and the time had come to make the project a reality. They hired Marc Miller of Big Ocean Studios to assist them.

As they began their work, the women knew they needed to carefully consider the image of the humane society that the site would portray.

"We don't really do very much advertising and we don't really have a fancy brochure or an annual report, so this really is our face for the public," Halligan said. "We have our pet walk, which is our signature event of the year, and we have our website. These are the two communication vehicles we have, so it's important to get it right."

Salomone agreed.

"That probably went into every page as a starting point — what do we want people to think and see and feel when they open our site, from the introductory home page to every page after," she said.

While determining just what face to present, the women came to an important realization.

"We kind of thought of ourselves as a place to adopt a pet, and we found that people are very connected to us and some have never adopted from us," Halligan said. "That's where we came up with this tag line, 'Celebrating pets and the people who love them.'"

The two were committed to featur-

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Getting out of the office gave Pam Salomone (left) and Lori Halligan time to focus on redesigning the Hinsdale Humane Society website, and free Wi-Fi made the McDonald's on York Road or in Oak Brook a great place to meet. The new site launched last week. (Jim Stonoff photos)

*Community House staff hopes new website reaches broader audience, is easier to use*

By Ken Knutson  
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Excitement was brimming as the time approached to launch the revamped website Saturday for The Community House, Executive Director Jenifer Fabian said.

"It was a big moment for us over the weekend when we flipped the switch and kind of heard the drum-roll cascading throughout the Internet," she said.

The unveiling was the culmination of a year's worth of research and design work. While the address remains the same — [community-house.org](http://community-house.org) — the site better represents the dynamic nature of the multi-dimensional organization, Fabian said.

"The bright, warm, friendly pictures (that appear) are exactly the kind of look that I was hoping for because it's fun, it makes you want to learn more," she said. "It looks inter-generational. It's fresh, it's eye-catching."

Dan Janowick, program and facilities director, helped shepherd the project from beginning to completion. He said the old site, with a framework from 2001, had become outmoded and drab vis-à-vis today's standards.

"We looked at our website and just felt a couple of steps behind in the information we had and the look and feel of the website," he said. "I think it's great to feel proud to send people to your website rather than having to apologize for your website."

Visitors arrive with different

needs, Janowick said, and a main objective was to make the steps to meet those needs crystal clear.

"We wanted to make sure that each one of those groups could go to our website for some useful information," he said.

The Community House received a service grant from Taproot Foundation for technical and consulting expertise on the project. The estimated cost of the labor was \$50,000.

Fabian said Taproot provided a "soup-to-nuts" assessment of the new website's purpose and operational needs and involved various stakeholders in the process through interviews.

"It's a very self-reflective process," she said. "It caused us to look in new ways about the difference that we make in communities, and what are the ways that we most want to invite people to get involved in that."

Janowick said, as is the case with many undertakings, destruction is simpler than construction.

"It's easy to look at our old website and say things we don't like, but it's a lot harder to come up with what do we want users on the new website to feel and be able to do," he said.

Understanding the ways a user interacts with the site was key, they said. Janowick gave the example of the Willowbrook Corner initiative, which staff considers an educational and support service but which residents see as a collection of programs.

"Recognizing that to the different users, the internal terminology we

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Community House staff members (from left) Sarah Sieracki, development coordinator, Mike Roth, development director, and Jeni Fabian, executive director, show off the organization's new website. Among other enhancements, the site makes online registration easier.

## *Humane Society's new site features animals available for adoption*

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ing shelter animals and volunteers in the photos on the site and brought in a professional photographer for four full days of shooting. They wanted the photos to show a mix of people and of pets.

"Lori was very adamant that we have equal dogs to cats," Salomone said.

They scheduled appointments and instructed individuals on what to wear. But animals can be unpredictable, and the photos didn't always work out.

"There's one where there is a baby and a cat. The baby didn't want anything to do with the cat. The cat didn't want to have anything to do with the baby," Halligan said.

The new site also features additional photos of animals available for adoption and, in some cases, short videos. The adoption pages are Salomone's favorite part of the new site.

"Studies have shown that animals get adopted quicker if there is more than one

photo and video," she said. "We had such limited information about the animals before and now we have information about their health and fitness and what's included in the adoption."

Feedback on the new site has been great, Halligan said, expressing relief that the undertaking is over.

"It was an exciting project to work on," she said. "It was a big learning curve, but you have a sense of accomplishment."

## *Community House hopes new website reaches broader audience*

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always use wasn't necessarily appropriate to someone outside," he said.

With online program registration at about one-third of all registrants and rising, the goal is to support that trend and also increase the number of website visits from its current 175 a day.

"If we have more useful and engaging information on the website, we hope that people will come to it," Janowick said.

Anecdotal entries from those served by The Community House will also be posted to keep financial partners apprised of the impact their support is having.

"We'd like to start using the website to share more success stories as a way to thank and acknowledge and describe the progress we've made through the services we provide," Fabian said.

And through features like 'Did You Know' boxes, additional information can be delivered to visitors to optimize their exposure to the site.

"As our services and our programs have expanded over the years, one of the opportunities we feel like we're well-positioned for now is to help raise awareness about how broad our offerings are," Fabian said.

But the work is not done yet, Fabian noted. Leadership plans to lean more intentionally into social networking and continue to collect user input on fine-tuning the site.

"I do think the website gives us a whole new avenue to get the community's feedback about how they would like to receive information," she said. "And we've got the tools to continue to improve it based on feedback that we

get, which we could not easily do in the past."

"We are all webmasters now," Janowick said with a laugh, referring to content management training the staff received.

The hardcopy program guide will continue to go out, and Fabian and Janowick see the two vehicles as complementary, not competing.

The evolution of the organization's approach to communication has reached a new stage, Fabian suggested, but not a terminus.

"It wasn't just putting a fun, new website up. It was all of that teasing through how did we get where we are and where do we want to be a couple of years from now," she said. "We also hope that website inspires people to get to know us and tell us what kind of resource we can be for them."