

ANIMAL INSTINCTS

The idea that animals need legal protection is becoming a reality in Minnesota, thanks to lawyers like these three women

By Katherine Glover • Photography by Peter Marcus

Lisa LaVerdiere *A Home for Life*

As Lisa LaVerdiere prepares to be interviewed in her animal sanctuary in Stillwater, she offers her visitor a dog mat to sit on. She takes the floor. "We use all our space for the animals," she explains. While she talks, she pets a large African tortoise and tries unsuccessfully to feed him a strawberry. "He's depressed because of the weather," she says. It's been raining all week.

LaVerdiere never wanted to be a lawyer. "Actually, I wanted to be a poet," she says. But her father was a lawyer, and she wound up on the same path, graduating from William Mitchell and going into toxic tort law.

These days, however, she practices only part-time. She spends much of her time — along with her law partner, Fred Jacobberger — working on behalf of animals. LaVerdiere is the founder of Home for Life, a permanent home for animals with special needs. Some of them are too old or too ill to find homes. Some are deaf or blind. She has two-legged dogs with their own custom-made wheelchairs. And she has two cat buildings, one devoted entirely to cats with feline leukemia. They're not allowed in regular shelters because they're contagious, but many show no symptoms and continue to live otherwise normal, happy lives.

She also houses animals with behavior problems — pets who aren't potty-trained, dogs who are aggressive. She has a row of doggy townhouses where dogs who don't play well with others can live by themselves or with just one roommate.

The rest live in the doggy apartments, which, like the doggy townhouses and the two cat buildings, are equipped with heating, air conditioning and piped-in jazz or classical music. The dogs lounge around on futons, escaping through a doggy door to their fenced-in backyard when-

LaVerdiere houses hundreds of animals with special needs

