Retirement home for chimps gets donation

By JOHN ANDREW PRIME
The Times

SHREVEPORT (AP) — The group creating a center for hundreds of chimpanzees retired from scientific and industrial research has found an ally in the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Internationally noted veterinarian Peter Theran — head of the society's health and hospitals division — flew into Shreveport recently to give $25,000 from the society to the Chimp Haven project.

"This is the first donation to the sanctuary of this magnitude from outside Louisiana," Chimp Haven spokeswoman Francesca Benten said.

Chimp Haven will occupy a 200-acre tract at the Eddie D. Jones Nature Park, under construction near Spring Ridge in southwestern Caddo Parish. The project is expected to be complete by 2003.

The grant marks another triumph for Chimp Haven, which has acquired $110,000 in new contributions and pledges, according to directors Linda Brent and Linda Koebner.

Theran said he first took note of Chimp Haven when he served on a National Academy of Sciences panel that discussed what to do with aging chimps.

The animals live to be 40 to 50 years old. Deciding what to do with them is an ethical dilemma in the scientific community, Theran said.

"They can learn sign language and talk to each other and to you and me in sign language," Theran said.

Killing a laboratory rat is one thing, but putting to death an animal that can tell you it feels bad or can ask how you feel is quite another, Theran said.

"(Chimp Haven) was the first organized effort to build (a retirement facility)," he said.

"There are smaller ones here and there. But there are hundreds of chimps that will need a sanctuary system," Theran said.

The scope of Chimp Haven's vision and the qualifications of its members impressed the Massachusetts group, leading to what Theran described as an "unusual" donation.

"I can't remember us giving this amount of money before. This is a large and unusual donation and reflects our confidence in ... Chimp Haven. These are very special animals, and they need a sanctuary."

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