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Brian Berry leaves the Capital Area Humane Society shelter with his just-adopted cat, Finch, on Monday.

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By **Alissa Widman Neese**

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After a disheartening two-day delay, it was official. Finch was finally going home.

Brian Berry had had his eye on the black-and-white cat for quite some time but had to put his weekend adoption plan on hold after a frozen pipe burst and flooded the Capital Area Humane Society, shutting it down Saturday morning.

When the nonprofit shelter near Hilliard reopened Monday afternoon, the Northwest Side resident was one of the first people in line. Berry and Finch seemed to be a perfect match; Berry recently lost a cat to cancer, and Finch's previous owner had died.

"I wasn't going to let this one get away," Berry said, smiling as he toted his new pal away in a blue carrier.

Like Berry, dozens of other people visited the shelter Monday, many of them eager to give a particular pet a home before the holidays. It opened at 2 p.m., and by 3:30 p.m., five cats and three dogs had been adopted. Sometimes it takes an entire Monday to give that many animals homes, the shelter staff said.

Rachel Finney, the shelter's executive director, said the outpouring of support is encouraging.

She credits firefighters from Columbus and Norwich Township for making it possible for the shelter to reopen so quickly. The pipe that ruptured — probably because of freezing weather — was part of the sprinkler system. When it burst, an alarm notified firefighters of the problem.

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Lt. Kevin Radwansky, one of the Columbus firefighters who responded, said he could see water pouring out a door as he approached the building. He and about six others forced their way in to shut off the water, preventing further damage. The deluge already had buckled a second-floor ceiling and poured down a staircase into the first floor.

Security footage inside the building showed firefighters using squeegees to clear several inches of water out of the building while waiting for Finney and others to arrive. They also checked on the animals to ensure they were safe and dry.

An overnight ice storm made travel difficult, and Finney said the help was a relief.

"It's just part of the job, trying to make a bad situation a little better," Radwansky said.

Adopting an animal is one of the best ways to help the Capital Area Humane Society as staff members continue to clean up and assess the damage, Finney said. Until further notice, the shelter is limiting its intake of animals and offering limited services by appointment only in its Animal Support Center.

The Capital Area Humane Society will be open from 2 to 7 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, and noon to 3 p.m. Christmas Eve. It will be closed Christmas Day and reopen Monday with normal hours. For more information or to donate, go to www.cahs-pets.org.

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