

FELINES AND FRIENDS NEW MEXICO

By Nancy Marano

Most municipal shelters and humane societies have open admission policies. This means they take any animal who comes through their doors. The problem is they only have a certain amount of room and can only keep an animal for a specified amount of time. If an animal isn't adopted within that time period, the shelter must euthanize even healthy animals to make space. Over four million companion animals a year are euthanized for lack of space. Some shelters work with a second chance organization that take the neediest animals and try to find homes for them. This is a wonderful solution where it exists.

Felines and Friends New Mexico is such a second chance organization. Since 2002, they have placed 2,500 cats and dogs. They rely solely on donations and all donations are used for veterinary care and supplies for the cats. They work with the Española Valley Humane Society and the Santa Fe Animal Shelter and Humane Society by accepting special needs cats. "These may be kittens who are too young to be adopted but who need to be socialized or adults who have health or behavioral issues," said Bobbi Heller, Executive Director of Felines and Friends New Mexico.

Currently 85 cats are cared for through this organization's 50+ foster homes. As with any foster based system, the number of cats they can take in depends on the number of foster homes they have. "We invite the person who rescues a cat to foster that cat until we can find a home," Heller said. They look for homes for these kitties through their website, by displaying the cats at Petco in Santa Fe, and at mobile adoption events.

"Our permanent adoption center is in the old bird room at Petco," Heller said. "Foster parents bring their cats on Sunday afternoon and pick them up the following Saturday afternoon if they haven't been adopted."

While the cats are at Petco, kitty caregivers come three times a day to check on them, feed

them and make sure the area is clean. They also pet, hold and play with the cats each day. Cats can come out and play in the totally enclosed cat area. Any cat who isn't doing well in this environment or who appears to be ill is taken out immediately and returned to his foster home.



Braveheart

"A great many of our adoptions are the result of customers seeing the cats at Petco and falling in love with them. Potential adopters are required to fill out a pre-adoption application. Their references are checked to ensure that our kitties are matched with the best forever home," Heller said.

Trap-neuter-return (TNR) is vital to caring for feral cats. At the moment Felines and Friends New Mexico is looking for a dedicated volunteer to be the feral cat coordinator as well as volunteers to oversee specific TNR projects and assist people in caring for feral colonies. "Until we have these volunteers, we can only provide access to resources and cannot do hands on trapping," Heller said. "We provide access to humane traps and to resources for low-cost or free spay/neuter programs."

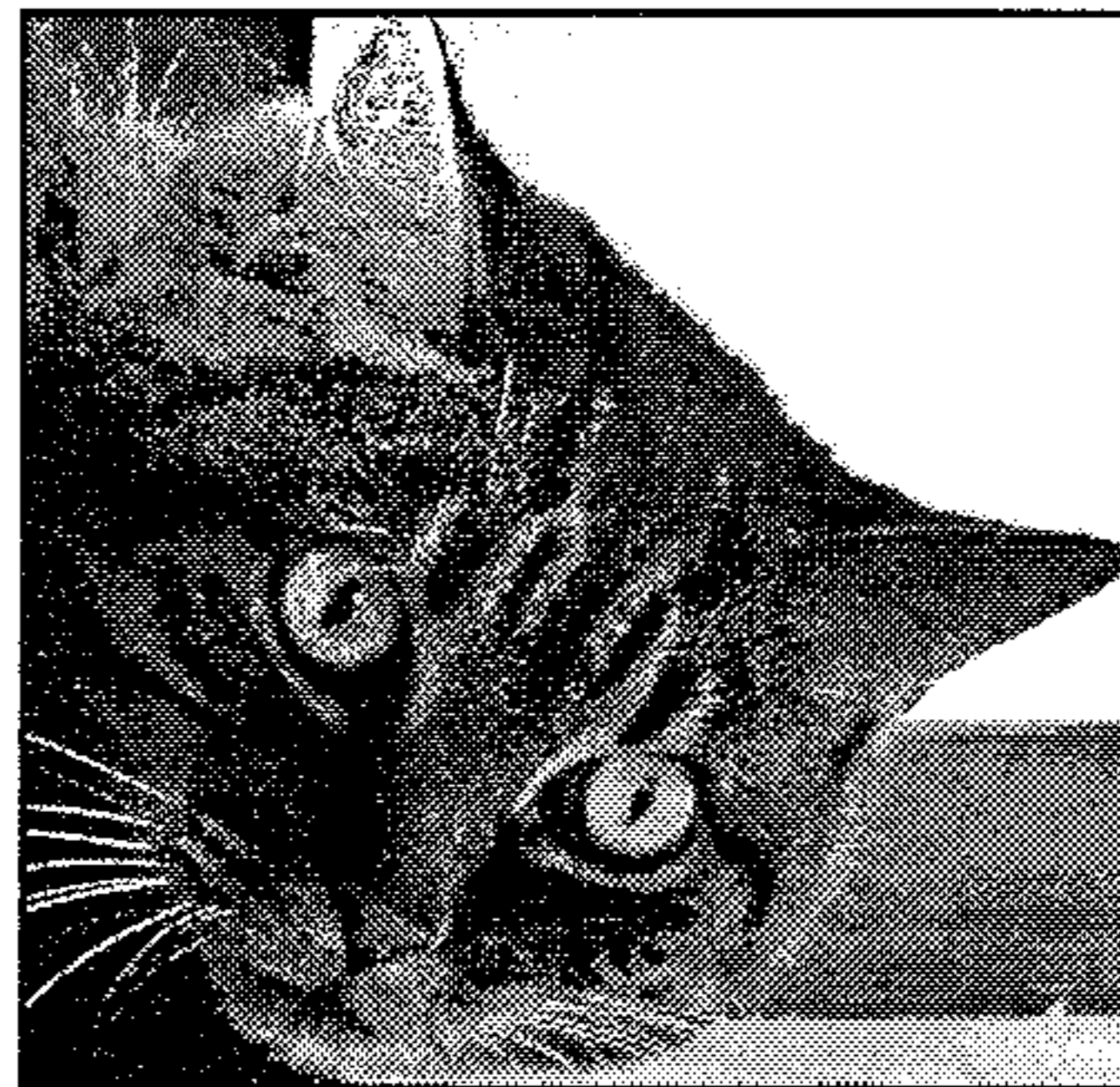
Heller recounts some of the successes they've had with ferals. One of these was Spencer, referred to as "Hissy Boy" for the first few months of his life. His foster mom sang to him every day while he hissed. Then one day she noticed the look in his eyes changed and he never hissed again. Now he has a happy, loving home with one of the group's volunteers and enjoys being picked up and hugged.

Volunteers are vital at Felines and Friends New Mexico. Without them this rescue group couldn't succeed. "In addition to the fosterers there are many other opportunities for volunteering. Over twenty volunteers are trained as adoption advisors and participate in the adop-

tion hours at Petco. They also volunteer at mobile adoption events at other locations including Teca Tu in Samburg Market Center. Teca Tu houses a special cat who lives there until adopted," Heller said. "More than 30 volunteers are trained as kitty caregivers. These people attend to the daily needs of the cats at Petco and sterilize the cat cages and adoption center every Sunday. Some volunteers do more than one task or help with paperwork, scheduling and other administrative tasks."

Felines and Friends New Mexico has many successes with the companion animals they've received from the shelters. One of these is Braveheart. He was hit by a car which shoved his intestines through his diaphragm and into his chest putting incredible pressure on his lungs. He also had a broken leg. He survived the delicate surgery performed by Dr. Brian Rose at VCA Veterinary Care Animal Hospital in Albuquerque and is available for adoption.

Piewacket was relinquished to the Santa Fe Humane Society and Animal Shelter by her owner and was then transferred to Felines and Friends New Mexico because she was so unhappy in a cage. She was emotionally 'shut down' at first, probably due to the loss of the only home she ever knew. She gets lots of love and attention in her foster home, where she is quite social. Piewacket is also awaiting adoption.



Piewacket

If you would like to help Felines and Friends New Mexico, they need volunteers, volunteers, volunteers. The jobs these volunteers will do are fostering cats or kittens, special needs cats or kittens who need to be bottle fed. They are also are looking for Petco kitty caregivers, adoption advisers, and TNR volunteers. Maybe you would like to do laundry and bowl cleaning at Petco or get the cages ready for the incoming cats on Sunday morning. What about transporting cats or working at mobile adoption events? If any of these appeal to you, please call 505-316-2281 or visit their website at www.petfinder.com/shelters/nm38.html

Congratulations to the 416 animals who were adopted at this year's statewide Fetch-a-palooza Adoption Event and to the families who now have loving companion animals. Enjoy the addition to your family.