

January, 2009
Volume 4, Issue 1

The Scratching Post

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Comments on the Scratching Post? Send ideas and suggestions to cbiond@nc.rr.com.



All About Volunteers

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TICA Cat Show

Have you ever wondered what happens at a cat show? On February 21st and 22nd, TICA, The International Cat Association, is holding its annual area show in the Holshauer Building of the NC State Fairgrounds.

This issue's *Spotlight on...* volunteer, Olga Wagner, attends and participates in cat shows, and often arranges for SAFE Haven to have a table at the shows to distribute information about the shelter and clinic. (Make sure you read about Olga in **Spotlight On...** on page 4!)

The show runs from 9 to 5 on Saturday and 8:30 to 4 on Sunday. If you'd like to see what goes on at a cat show and can help out at the table for a couple of hours, please e-mail the shelter at

Holiday Gift Wrapping Wrap-up

The annual Holiday Gift Wrap was a great success this year, raising \$1370.66 that goes directly into SHFC's budget. Of the total, \$1319.66 came from donations, with the remainder coming from the sale of catnip mice and pillows.

For some great stories that came out of this event, see **Holiday Gift Wrap Stories** on page 3.

Weekday Adoptions Begin!

On November 11 SAFE Haven began opening for adoptions during the week. We're now open on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. in addition to our normal Saturday and Sunday adoption hours.

In November we adopted 8 cats on weekdays; in December (up to 1/2/09), we adopted 29 cats on weekdays. Since we started doing weekday adoptions we've adopted well over 100 cats (including weekend adoptions).

So far, it appears that being open on weekdays has brought in at least a few people who would not have come in on a weekend; we hope to continue this trend and increase our total adoptions significantly in the coming year.

Volunteers Extraordinaire!

We continue to recognize volunteers who've been part of the SAFE Haven for Cats family for many years. Here are volunteers who started in 2002 and who are still contributing to the SAFE Haven mission.

Sharon Dixon
Jenni Elion
Linda Jones
Jennifer Reed
Jessie Wofford
Lisa Karner
Kym Gowdy
Lany McDonald
Leslie and Alex Knuth
Sherri Orner
Stephanie Smith

Thank you all for your years of dedication and service!

Save the Date!

Fifth Annual
Tuxedo Cat Ball
Friday, April 17, 2009
at
Sisters' Garden!

Meet the SHFC and SAFE Care Staff

Most SHFC volunteers know that the SAFE Care clinic performs low-cost spay and neuters, in addition to providing medical care for shelter animals. However, we rarely see the SAFE Care staff, especially the veterinary assistants who work with Dr. Pethick to provide this care. Jan Midden is one of those vet assistants.



Jan Midden has been interested in animals and animal care her entire life. After her children grew up she decided to start volunteering and to go back to school to become a vet tech. She started by volunteering with the SPCA, but that didn't seem to be a good fit. She found SAFE Haven on the internet and began volunteering in 2003, cleaning cages and making sure the cats were kept happy. She talked to Pam about her desire to become a vet tech, looking for advice from someone who had performed similar work.

When the SAFE Care clinic was expanded to service outside patients in February, 2004, Pam and Dr. Pethick asked Jan if she'd like to start getting some hands-on experience. Jan jumped at the chance, and became one of the first veterinary assistants at the clinic.

Jan is now the longest-tenured vet assistant at SAFE Care. She checks patients in and out, reviews procedures with their humans, sets up the surgery for Dr. Pethick, monitors the cats' recovery from surgery, applies flea treatment and gives medication, and generally makes sure things run smoothly in the clinic. She normally works Tuesday through Thursday (other assistants work Monday and Friday).

This job isn't Jan's first one in animal care. When she was 16 to 22 she worked as a zoo-keeper at the Pittsburgh Children's Zoo. Being a zoo-keeper involved a lot of cage cleaning and feeding of animals – similar to what we do in the shelter. But it also involved working with a chimpanzee who was a star in the children's zoo. Jan's responsibilities included bathing and dressing the chimp, and then taking her out to interact with the children several times a day.

There isn't much about her vet assistant job that Jan doesn't like. She says that Dr. Pethick is great to work with, and feels she's learned so much from her about handling cats. Every day has its challenges – the clinic team even has a name for those days when none of the cats

will cooperate. They're called 'cat rodeo' days, because it seems like there are cats flying off the tables and bouncing off the walls every few minutes. Those are the days when Jan's cat-handling skills are tested.

Jan has learned various techniques to handle problem cats, and has developed her ability to assess how a cat is going to react. She's often able to anticipate a change in the cat's behavior through her hands, as she's holding the cat during exams. Developing her sense of how the cat is responding and what it needs at any moment is one of the most interesting and rewarding parts of the job.

Jan says that she enjoys every day in the clinic. One of her primary goals each day is to make sure Dr. Pethick doesn't get injured by an upset or aggressive cat, since if she gets hurt the work of the clinic stops.

The clinic isn't the only place where Jan cares for animals. She's got

three cats in her home: Hobbes, a four-year-old Maine coon mix; Shauncey, whom she's fostering for the shelter; and a calico stray, Patches, who is friendly but prefers to stay outside. She also shares her home with a dog, Boomer, and a cockatiel, Chico. Hum, add a chimp and she'd be stiff competition for that children's zoo in Pittsburgh!

No amount of time can erase the memory of a good cat; and no amount of masking tape can ever totally remove his fur from your couch.

Lee Dworken



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ASK THE VET ... *About the Older Cat: Age-Related Changes and Illnesses*

by Betsy Pethick, D.V.M.

As with humans, the life expectancy of cats has increased over the last decade. On average, cats now live to be 14 to 16 years old. This means that many of us will have senior cats in our homes, and it is important to be aware of the difference between normal aging changes and illness. Here are some areas of concern:

1. **The Eyes:** Ophthalmologic changes include atrophy of the iris, melanin deposits on the iris, and lenticular sclerosis (increased density of the lens). While the first two do not affect vision, lenticular sclerosis results in decreased acuity in dim light. This may contribute to "nocturnal yowling" (especially when coupled with hearing loss), as the older cat attempts to orient herself to her surroundings.

2. **The Mouth:** Oral diseases such as periodontal disease, root exposure, stomatitis (inflammation of the oral cavity) and oral tumors are all potentially painful conditions of the senior cat. Signs include decreased appetite/weight loss, salivation, and foul breath odor.

3. **The Urinary Tract:** The incidence of kidney disease and urinary tract infections rise considerably in the older cat. As kidney function declines, urine concentrating ability declines. This disrupts the body's defense against urinary tract infections. Signs include more frequent trips to the litter box and larger urine volume.

4. **The Endocrine System:** Diabetes mellitus and hyperthyroidism are more common in the older cat, and may look very similar to kidney disease. All 3 can lead to weight loss and increased thirst and urination.

5. **The Musculoskeletal System:** A recent study reviewing 100 x-rays taken of cats (for various reasons) showed that 90% of cats over the age of 12 had evidence of degenerative joint disease.

Unlike our canine companions where lameness is a common sign, cats are more likely to show behavior changes. These include inappropriate elimination (especially next to the litter box, as stepping into the box is associated with pain), decreased grooming, reluctance to be petted or combed, reluctance to jump, sleeping more and moving less, and even hiding or withdrawing from human interaction.

Cats can be "masters of disguise" when it comes to health problems. As part of

their natural effort to protect themselves, they may go to great lengths to appear healthy even when they are very ill. We as caretakers must be observant of subtle changes in thirst, appetite, and behavior.

Many of these ailments can be managed or even cured with prompt veterinary intervention. We owe it to our feline companions to safeguard their well-being throughout their senior years.

Holiday Gift Wrapping Stories!

Every year WRay Templeton organizes the SHFC holiday gift wrapping event. He starts by contacting bookstores in the area to see what wrapping slots we can get, and then matches up volunteers and friends with the slots. As the gift wrapping proceeds, he coordinates setup and support for the entire effort (in addition to filling in on some slots, since it seems like there are never quite enough volunteers).

For some of us, being out there talking to the public and wrapping their gifts is a little scary. But most people who've done it once are excited about signing up the next year. Even when the wrapping is a bit amateurish (as mine tends to be), the people we talk to are almost always friendly and very happy to be going home with wrapped gifts. They love telling us about their animals, while we spread the word about SAFE Haven.

Each year volunteers come back with stories about touching or funny things that happened during their wrapping shifts. Here's a couple from two of this year's volunteers.

Mary Nell Murphy, who has wrapped now for two years and intends to sign up again next year, has been part of the SAFE Haven family for about five years. She says that she's met a lot of nice people during the wrapping, and only the very occasional 'Scrooge'.

One of those nice people was a lady who had several items to be wrapped and seemed to be embarrassed that she had only \$5.00 in cash to donate (the volunteers assured her that was a wonderful, much appreciated donation). While Mary Nell was helping to wrap the gifts, the lady read through a SHFC brochure. She immediately dug out her checkbook and wrote a check for a SAFE Haven membership!

Another of Mary Nell's customers was a gentleman who said that he'd adopted an older SAFE Haven cat, perhaps 7 or 8 years old at the time. He spoke about how much his 11-year old daughter loved that cat. Mary Nell commented that his daughter might be a 'volunteer in the making', and he agreed that she would probably love to volunteer as soon as she was old enough.

Inez Leyden, a long-time volunteer and a gift-wrapping veteran, had a wonderful
(continued on page 4)

Spotlight On...

Olga Wagner

**Thursday Night Cleaning Captain
and Board Member**



Olga and Nacho, her 4-year old Devon Rex

Have you ever seen the oil paintings of cats that show up around the shelter just before the Tuxedo Cat Ball, or perhaps seen them at the Ball itself? Volunteer Olga Wagner, a self-taught artist, contributes these beautiful works to the shelter. She contributed three original paintings to last year's TCB. And that's only one of the ways Olga contributes to SHFC.

Olga has been with SHFC for a little over three years. She is a Thursday night cleaning captain, and occasionally helps out on weekend shifts. She is a member of the SHFC's board of directors, organizes tables at cat shows, and is on the TCB auction committee.

Olga found SAFE Haven when she was looking for a low-cost spay option for a kitten that her husband had rescued from the warehouse of his store. She has a long history of caring for animals, going back to her childhood. She grew up in a family that always had a variety of animals – rescued cats and dogs, hamsters, fish, and the occasional mouse.

Olga's first hamster was a rescue. A

family was moving and dropped off the hamster at her parent's house. They took it in, and it became Olga's pet. Olga's family is still involved in animal rescue – her parents have a rescued Dalmatian and four stray cats, and her sister has two rescued cats.

Currently she cares for four inside cats, Jaws, Nash, Nacho and Pugsley, who range from 9 to 2 years old. She owns a 26-year old horse, Shelby. She feeds 3 feral kitties (who've been to SHFC for spaying/neutering), several opossums and raccoons, and the occasional fox and squirrel. (There's a motion detector light on the back deck where the food is, so she's alerted when the various critters come up to feed.)

All of her indoor cats are Devon Rex kitties. Olga's husband used to be very anti-cat, because he was severely

allergic to them. Devon Rex kitties, with curly, non-furry coats, tend to be 'hypo-allergenic', and Olga says her husband is now a cat fanatic. The two-year old boy, Pugsley, is a show cat – thus Olga's interest in cat shows, where she arranges and manages a table to distribute information about SHFC and SAFE Care. (She's often looking for volunteers to help her at the table, if you're interested in seeing a cat show!)

In addition to SHFC, Olga supports other animal care and rescue organizations in multiple ways. She gets great pleasure from caring for animals, and often contributes her paintings for various fund-raising activities. If you'd like to see more of Olga's art, cat-oriented and otherwise, visit her web site at www.catclawsstudio.com.

Holiday Gift Wrapping Stories

continued

experience during one of her wrapping shifts. Here's her story in her own words.

"I've been participating in the annual SAFE Haven gift-wrapping event for as long as I can remember. I love doing it because of the interesting people I meet (both shoppers and other volunteers) and amazing stories I hear. In the last two years I've gotten some friends to join me and none of them have been disappointed.

This year I wrapped at two different stores on four different days. My first session was at Barnes & Nobles at Triangle Towne Center. Towards the end of my shift I noticed a young boy – around 10 – with his Mom. I overheard him saying, 'Mommy, Mommy – look, cats!' A very brief exchange took place and she said, 'Ok – go ahead'.

The boy approached with a small book to wrap while his Mother stayed back. As we were wrapping we engaged him in conversation, finding out he had three cats at home. He then opened HIS wallet so he could make his donation. I was anticipating a dollar (which as other gift wrappers know is sufficient – we're thankful for any amount). Imagine my surprise when he placed a \$5 bill in our donation jar! Of course we thanked him but I was moved almost to tears. Five dollars to a child that age is a significant amount of money. His mom saw what he did and as he approached her she bent down and kissed his forehead.

My shift ended after this and as I left the store I spotted the woman (her son a little bit away from her). I stopped her to compliment her on her son, whom she referred to as 'a sweet boy'. I told her it said a lot about her as a parent. It's encounters like this that make me continue to volunteer at the gift wrapping event."

In addition to raising funds for SHFC, this event allows us to spread the word about what we do, recruit new volunteers, and add to the positive holiday spirit in the world. What better way to spend a few hours in the weeks before Christmas!