

Ambassador **Spotlight**

Opposite Sides

of the Street

Downtown Reading, Pa., had a problem. Feral cats were eating out of dumpsters and going into abandoned houses and garages, endangering not only themselves but also threatening to spread disease. More and more cats seemed to appear overnight.

Cat lover Nikki Pauley worked downtown for an insurance broker. Alarmed by the increasing number of cats and their risk of injury, she and a friend began humanely trapping cats so they could be spayed and neutered.

Meanwhile, Jennifer Schouten, a member of the Best Friends Network based in Kanab, Utah, had been alerted that help was needed capturing the feral cats in Reading. Working on opposite sides of the streets to rescue the cats, Pauley and Schouten got acquainted.

It wasn't long before the women were working together. In the late spring and summer of 2002, they trapped about 60 cats, including 10 kittens, all of which went to homes. The healthy adults, once spayed and neutered, were released at a nearby farm.

"We were fortunate to find a farm that was down to two barn cats that were 16 years old," Pauley says. "Someone had volunteered to make cages for us to keep in the barn. The cats had to be caged for three weeks so when they were released, they stayed and didn't take off."

A New Cat Rescue Group

With a shared passion for helping abandoned cats, Pauley and Schouten decided to start their own local cat rescue group. The CatWorks Inc. was formed



Nikki Pauley, one of the founders of The CatWorks Inc., holds "Jimmy" during a cat adoption event.

in September 2002. From the beginning, the cat rescuers established nonprofit status as a 501(c)(3) organization. "We felt people would be more willing to donate if they knew their gift was tax-deductible," Pauley says.

Motivated to enrich the lives of cats without homes and orphaned kittens, they set out to provide veterinary care and foster homes for these animals until permanent homes could be found. In four years, The CatWorks has grown to include 12 foster homes and 18 volunteers. The organization plucks cats from the Berks and Lancaster counties' shelters, plus they receive phone calls from

owners who can no longer keep their cats. About 400 cats each year find new homes due to their efforts.

"We don't have a shelter so foster homes and volunteers are especially important to us," Schouten says. "Foster parents take in cats when they are current on vaccinations and spayed or neutered until we can adopt them out. Our volunteers work tirelessly, giving their time, energy and oftentimes their personal money to help save just one more cat. We wouldn't be able to help so many cats without our volunteers and foster families."

Getting Down to Business

Besides needing help from volunteers, The CatWorks needed a business plan that included fundraising and promoting cats available for adoption. Schouten, owner of NewComm Technology, an audio-video conferencing equipment company, tapped into her resources to develop a logo that would give the group an identity.

Pauley turned to a friend who was an expert in designing Web sites to help them create an Internet presence. On their Web site, visitors can learn how to adopt or donate, about foster care, upcoming events and successful adoptions.

They also promote cats with special needs on their Web site. "Ellie," a first-time mother at age 6 months, is an example. Someone's pet, Ellie was allowed to go outside and ended up pregnant. She wandered onto someone's property to have her kittens. The property owner told a neighbor he was going to drown Ellie and her kittens, so the neighbor gathered



them up and turned them over to The CatWorks.

"Ellie is now taking care of her babies. She no longer has to hunt for food and try to find a safe place for her family," says Pauley. "She's a very sweet girl. She purrs all the time and likes to talk to you."

Fundraising is paramount to staying in business. "We recently raised \$1,200 by holding a bingo fundraiser," Pauley says. The CatWorks holds an annual yard sale in May and an annual cookout in July. Both events help to offset costs. The group incurs expenses for spaying and neutering, vaccines, flea treatment, deworming, testing for feline leukemia and AIDS, and a veterinary physical examination.

Becoming Rescue Ambassadors

Always on the lookout for fundraising opportunities, Pauley and Schouten jumped at the chance to apply to become *Purina Pro Plan Rally to Rescue* Ambassadors when they learned about the program. Last January, they became Ambassadors.



The CatWorks Inc.

To learn more about The CatWorks Inc., please visit their Web site at www.thecatworksinc.org. You may also send them an e-mail at info@thecatworksinc.org or call them at (610) 375-0348.

They received an event kit with a tent, banner, flags, T-shirts and water bowls to use at adoption events. "It was wonderful," Pauley says. "Our own tent was falling apart. It had seen better years."

Additionally, they received colorful, nylon *Rally to Rescue* collar and wristband sets that promote the importance of rescue to use for fundraising. Occasional deliveries of *Purina Pro Plan* brand cat food help with food expenses.

Proud to represent *Rally to Rescue*,

Nicole Plank, adoption director for The CatWorks, says goodbye to "Donatello," who is going home with his new owners. Plank fostered the male cat.

The CatWorks added information to its Web site about the program, explaining how the focus is supporting smaller pet rescue organizations and helping to raise awareness for pet rescue.

Still, the driving force is helping to place cats in permanent, loving homes, and both Pauley and Schouten have memories of special ones. One 4-week-old kitten, "Sparky" had been set on fire and thrown from a car window.

"When she came to us her hair was completely singed and she had lost most of her ears," Schouten says. "After a lot of love and care, we found her a permanent home and her new owner renamed her 'Miracle.'

"When you see a cat that you have rescued handed over to his new permanent home, you know you have given the greatest gift a person can give," Schouten says. "That moment makes everything worthwhile." ♦