

New Pendleton resident raises an internet sensation

By **ERICK PETERSON**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — When Charly Hotchkiss moved to Pendleton in early January to take the job as the news clerk for the East Oregonian, she brought along an Instagram celebrity.

Thumbz, her 28-toed cat. The orange feline has the congenital physical anomaly polydactyly.

Hotchkiss was 15 and living in Santa Fe, New Mexico, when she acquired the cat. Her parents employed a man who had an extra cat, Hotchkiss said, and the man was planning to either give the 1-year-old cat to a new owner or release it to the wild so “the coyotes could have it.”

“He’s not a great guy,” Hotchkiss said.

She heard he killed his ex-girlfriend and himself sometime after letting go of the cat.

For Hotchkiss, Thumbz filled a cat-shaped hole in her heart. Still grieving over the death of her previous cat a couple months earlier, she said she was ready for a new critter. And when her father called her and asked her if she wanted a cat who might “have something wrong with him,” she rushed over to claim him.

When she first spotted him, she noticed his extra toes, hence the name. But there was nothing wrong with him. Polydactyly is not uncommon in cats, Hotchkiss said, but having 28 toes is a world record. The cat has seven digits on each paw.

The Guinness World Records website confirms her claim. It names a 28-toed Canadian cat, Jake, as the world-record holder with the same situation — seven toes on each of its four paws.

“I really wish he had one



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Thumbz, a 28-toed cat living in Pendleton with its owner, Charly Hotchkiss, has amassed an Instagram following of more than 23,000 after he was featured on Morbid: A True Crime Podcast.

more,” Hotchkiss said.

When she welcomed the cat into her life, she did not imagine the fame Thumbz would achieve.

Today, the cat has more than 23,000 Instagram followers. More people follow Thumbz than live in either Pendleton or Hermiston.

Instagram fame

When she entered college, Hotchkiss started an Instagram account for Thumbz. She said it was just something for her to share pictures with her friends.

“I really wasn’t taking it very seriously,” she said.

Fame took off thanks to one of her favorite podcasts,

Morbid: A True Crime Podcast.

Hotchkiss’s sister, who also is a fan of Morbid, wrote a letter to the hosts of the show and told them of Thumbz. The letter, “How My Sister Got Her 28-Toed Cat from a Murderer,” was received and read on the podcast last year. Along with telling the story, the podcast shared Thumbz’s Instagram handle @thumbzthecat, and people started following it en masse.

“Overnight, he gained thousands of followers,” Hotchkiss said. “So then I started being more active with it.”

She said she began posting more, which gained

the attention of even more followers. In addition, a kitty litter company took notice. PrettyLitter featured Thumbz in an ad last year,

she said. The ad appeared on Instagram.

Hotchkiss said she is not getting rich off of Thumbz, though he does net her some cash. Instagram paid Hotchkiss \$75 in January because of her cat’s large following.

A single post on Thumbz’s Instagram can receive hundreds or even thousands of likes. Hotchkiss said she has just more than 2,000 followers on her own account, but she said she is not at all envious of Thumbz’s popularity; rather, she is enjoying it.

She even said she has goals for him. She wants Thumbz to reach 25,000 followers by the end of March.

The life of Thumbz

He often sits on his cat tower and stares out the window, looking for squirrels in the trees.

“He’s an old man now,”

Hotchkiss said.

That’s fine with her. The cat has, after all, lived with Hotchkiss in New Mexico, Eugene, California, Hawaii and now Pendleton.

Thumbz weighs 15.7 pounds. She said he might be a Maine coon or an American bobtail; she is not certain which, if either. And while he is not a lap cat, Hotchkiss said, he will climb up on a person’s chest to be petted, but only for people he likes.

Thumbz is not entirely an indoor cat. She takes Thumbz out on a leash. She said he likes to roll around in dirt.

“That’s one of his favorite things,” she said. “He gets really dirty.”

Thumbz also does not meow, Hotchkiss said. Instead, he makes a trill. And while he is particular about his cat food, he will eat cream cheese off Hotchkiss’s fingers.

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