

Jackson Galaxy Makes Unexpected Visit to Columbia County

TV star and animal behaviorist helps save animals and spread the message about the pet overpopulation problem

Television personality Jackson Galaxy, star of Animal Planet's reality TV show *My Cat from Hell*, made a surprise visit to the Columbia Humane Society (CHS) in St. Helens on August 9.

Galaxy flew to Oregon from Los Angeles with Ric Browde, President of Wings of Rescue, a non-profit providing desperately needed air transport for thousands of pets from overcrowded, high intake animal shelters, to shelters with empty kennel space and adopters waiting. Galaxy and Browde transported 126 cats and kittens to Oregon the day of Galaxy's visit, delivering 111 cats to the Portland Humane Society, and then bringing 15 more to the Columbia County shelter.

"Today we're here as part of what's called 'Operation Homeward Bound,'" said Galaxy in an interview during his visit. "Along with Wings of Rescue, the Jackson Galaxy Project is putting together trips that focuses on the overpopulation problem. We're looking for partners to get cats out of Los Angeles, and Columbia County and Oregon Humane Society stepped up and said, yes, they would take these cats. This all started when a friend of mine who works in one of the most overpopulated shelters in LA called me and said they were just so full with cats and they were all going to be euthanized tomorrow. So we decided to jump in Ric's plane and bring them here and now we're going to start doing it nationally."

CHS staff scrambled to alert volunteers and supporters of the shelter about Galaxy's surprise visit, so they would have a chance to meet the popular star. About 60 fans turned out for Galaxy's visit.

"In conjunction with Wings of Rescue and the Jackson Galaxy Project, we agreed to take in some cats from California that were set to be euthanized, so Jackson agreed to spend some time with us," said Lisa Beggio, CHS's Director.

Galaxy said he was thrilled with the turnout at the event. "This is amazing and makes me so happy, not because I'm

any kind of a celebrity – I love it because this is a community that rallies around their shelter and that makes me really, really happy. Everybody that came in here spent some time with the cats and I'm sure some adoptions will come from this."

Galaxy says he does his work for a simple reason. "When I go on Facebook or the news to talk about what we're doing, there's the subtext underneath, that this is because cats are dying, because no one is spay or neutering, be-



cause they're not practicing TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return) for feral cats, because they're not holding up their end of the bargain. We have to realize that these are not vermin. They are a problem, but they are a problem that WE made. Humans made this issue and we are the reason why we are killing millions of animals every year in shelters. We have to take responsibility. This community here is doing a huge part, which is why we're bringing our cats up here."

Galaxy has worked in animal shelters for the past 25 years. He learned about cat behavior through his work with rescue cats, originally with the Humane Society in Boulder, Colorado. He later went into private practice as a cat consultant, working with cat owners and focusing on the connection between physical and behavioral health. In 2007, Galaxy moved to Los Angeles, where he continues to maintain a private consulting practice, working one-on-one with cats in their homes and working with clients to improve their cats' behavioral is-

sues. He has appeared as the official cat behaviorist expert on several television shows and in media. Since May 2011 he has starred in *My Cat From Hell*, helping cat guardians resolve conflict and behavioral issues between them and their cats. He is also the author of several bestselling books about cats and creating cat-friendly spaces in homes. He currently serves on the Board of Directors for Stray Cat Alliance, and Fix Nation in Los Angeles, as well as the Board of Advisors for Neighborhood Cats in New York City.

CHS was one of 47 shelters that was selected by Galaxy's foundation, the Jackson Galaxy Project (JGP), to participate in the Summer 2018 Semester of Cat Pawsitive, a life-saving initiative created by Galaxy, that introduces positive-reinforcement training to cats in shelters and rescues. The focus is on fun, positive reinforcement-based training sessions that help cats connect more quickly with potential adopters.



"The Cat Pawsitive Program helps show that cats can be more adoptable, but it also decreases stress, allows cats to not go as kennel crazy, and also helps them stay in homes once they are adopted," said Galaxy. "It's working really well. At the end of this year we should have over 100 programs that have learned this method."

"We have two volunteers who are working to become certified as Cat Pawsitive Trainers," explained CHS Director Beggio. "We're working with a number of cats through the program to teach them to sit, give high fives, jump through hoops – basic tricks to make the cats more appealing to adopters. This is helping us expand our cat program and help people see the value in what we do here."

Galaxy says, while he's not a big fan of teaching cats tricks so they

can be entertaining, it does help them get adopted. "If you walk by a cat in a shelter and it gives you a high five, that cat is going home," says Galaxy. "I learned all this from working with dogs, but the first time I taught a cat to give a high five, it left the building ten minutes later. It was a cat who would have been euthanized 24 hours later. It's an amazing feeling to know that, 25 years after starting this, where all we knew was putting cats down, that I can be part of a program that is stopping that from happening."

"One of our problems is that our Cat Pawsitive cats keep getting adopted, so we have to keep starting over again," said Beggio. "Which is a really good problem to have."

Wings of Rescue, which transported Galaxy and the cats to Oregon, flies pets from all around the world, including rescue missions to flooded and other disaster areas. "We work very closely with them," said Beggio. "They're a wonderful organization."

Wings of Rescue President Browde lives in Beverly Hills and has been helping transport animals from overcrowded shelters for the past five years. He says he has saved about 30,000 pets during that time. "We've been progressively growing," said Browde. "We do two types of transports, ones like this today with animals from overcrowded shelters, and we've taken over 4,500 pets out of hurricane zones. When we went down to get those animals our planes never went empty, we always took humanitarian aid and supplies. We're an all volunteer organization and it's a labor of love. I always feel like we still don't do enough."

Galaxy says this is his second trip to the Pacific Northwest with cats – he helped bring 158 cats to Seattle several weeks ago. "We're helping create a culture and we feel like we're turning a corner now," said Galaxy. "It's no longer an assembly line, where the only thing we do in shelters is put animals down. Now we're seeing the tide turn and it's an amazing feeling when you see humans finally getting to the point where they recognize their responsibility."

Galaxy ended his visit with these parting words, "Please spay and neuter your cats. Please educate yourselves on Trap-Neuter-Return for feral cats, and tell your neighbors to do the same thing. At this point there is no reason that any cat should not be spayed or neutered."

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