

Campus Petting Sounds like fun, but what happens when school's out?

By Sara Brickner

For shelter animals, the cats at Greenhill Humane Society live in the lap of luxury. Greenhill's cattery, a bright, sunny room with picture windows, isn't just a safe haven with regular meals. It's a kitty playground, complete with toys, scratching posts and benches for potential adopters to sit and meet the cats. To anyone used to the grim, cramped cages found in most animal shelters, these kitties are living in the Park Avenue of catteries.

Unfortunately, they are a small percentage of the strays that populate the streets of Eugene. And what Greenhill visitors don't get to see is the office that's been converted into an extra kitten room. In this impromptu branch of the cattery, kittens sleep on a desk next to a computer and play hide-and-seek underneath an office chair. For the past two years, there has been an explosion of kittens in Eugene, due to unusually mild weather and a large abandoned, stray and feral cat population.

It is an affliction that the Humane Society of the United States says is common in college towns — and Eugene is no exception. All it takes is a visit to Lane County Animal Regulation Authority, the Lane County animal shelter, where Senior Animal Control Officer Bernard Perkins said that once school gets out, "the increase in concerns and calls [about abandoned pets] is about 300 percent." Usually, he says, the animals left behind are cats. According to LCARA Senior Animal Welfare Officer William Waugh, the increase is "significant enough that any of us doing this for a while would catch on to it."

It's not just a hunch, either. Between the month of May 2005 and the month of June (when school gets out for the summer) the number of animals brought to LCARA by the public increased from 83 in May to 188 in June — 188 is also the highest number of citizen-impounded animals since July 2004, in contrast to the measly 45 animals impounded by officers dur-



PHOTO COURTESY GREENHILL HUMANE SOCIETY

ing the same month.

Frankly, Waugh says, "This is the animal garbage dump." And often, it's the LCARA officers who end up as the garbage collectors. Perkins says it's not uncommon for a vast range of species to come in from campus-area landlords and, occasionally, from the UO dormitories.

"You end up finding a whole array of animals," says Perkins who has himself picked up abandoned pets at dorms. But because there are no Lane County ordinances governing cats, LCARA usually will only take in cats if they are injured, sick, or if the person who brought the cat pays a fee to cover the cat's expenses. In fact, LCARA's cattery is no longer funded by the city of Eugene, perhaps in part because of the lack of legislation regarding cats. Which means that if a healthy cat is abandoned, it is free to roam — and reproduce — at will.

In one mating season, Greenhill Operations Director Theresa Iverson said that one cat could produce up to three litters of kittens, which will likely become the next generation of feral, unadoptable cats that will be euthanized if

brought to a shelter.

Waugh says that Eugene is about on par for its demographic makeup, but both he and Perkins believe that Eugene's large student population does contribute to the abandoned animal problem. At this point, Waugh says, "I just about will not adopt a kitten to a college student."

Iverson and Waugh agree that moving is one of the main reasons people surrender their pets to shelters. Greenhill Community Relations Manager Kimberly Johnson theorizes that since college students tend to be a transient bunch, there may be a correlation between the number of abandoned and stray animals and the number of students in Eugene. So when students come in to Greenhill at the beginning of the school year, Theresa Iverson often steers them away from adoption, suggesting instead that the student apply for Greenhill's foster program. Foster "parents" take in Greenhill animals that are recovering from surgery, or are too young to be adopted, for a specified period of time, at most a few months. That way, there's no long-term commitment.

"A lot of the problems that we're having with

the reproduction of cats are the abandoned animals left at home," Iverson said. If everyone spayed and neutered, she says Greenhill wouldn't have major space issues. The cost of the procedure can be a deterrent, but the Eugene Animal Hospital and the City of Eugene Low Cost Spay and Neuter Clinic offer low-cost vaccines and spay and neuter services. Local organizations help, like the Feral Cat Coalition, the Stray Cat Alliance and Stop Pet Overpopulation Today, which encourage spaying and neutering and help low-income people with vet bills.

Eugene and Lane County codes both stipulate that unwanted or abandoned animals adopted through LCARA or any other shelter must be spayed or neutered. If not, the pet owner may be fined up to \$500 dollars under Eugene city code or \$816 under county code. And neither Greenhill nor LCARA will adopt out pets to people who live in residences with "no pets" policies, because an Oregon landlord can evict tenants with only 10 days' notice for harboring an unauthorized pet. At Greenhill, 30 percent of adoption applications are denied because of landlord refusals.

Greenhill estimates that 40,000 homeless animals are wandering the streets of Lane County, which makes finding a pet no more difficult than peeking into the bushes. And it's not unusual for students to sneak pets in despite supposedly strict "no pets" policies. Roommates Frank and Blair, UO students who took in an abandoned cat despite their apartment complex's "no pets" policy, are one example. They're not worried about getting caught, they say, because they're not the only ones breaking the rules.

"There's a lot of people at those apartments who have cats," Frank said. Olive, Frank's cat, was abandoned in a campus area neighborhood. She's been living with Frank and Blair for a year and a half. Recently, Blair also adopted a puppy named Rio.

The men say that paying for their pet expenses isn't a problem, but Blair does have one concern — damage.

"I worry about [Rio] ripping our house up," he said.

It's a valid concern. And for landlords like Bill Olson, Sr., co-owner of OBO Enterprises LLC, pet damages are the main reason why

Animal Psychic

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