

# For the Love of Cats

BY NOELLE JAROCH

Outside the Friends of Parkville Animal Shelter (FOPAS) cathouse, the sky is gray and anything but cheery. Inside the small building, cages and cat paraphernalia occupy almost every available space, but missing is the typical sadness one might expect to feel inside a shelter on such a bleak day. It's fitting these cats live in an old house, because this feels like a home — a kitty kingdom, if you will — and Natalie Sligar is their queen.

Sligar, the second vice president of FOPAS — came to the shelter after beginning as a volunteer in 1999, and she nods enthusiastically in response to a comment about the cats cozy environment. "Being volunteer-driven is what adds the magic around here," she says, "It's the volunteers who bring the toys, etc., and the cats are so loved."

Volunteers provide not only cuddles, but also the daily essentials of food, water, clean litter boxes and a safe space in which many of the cats have the opportunity to explore and socialize throughout the day. Loved as they are within the shelter, Sligar and her volunteers ultimately cheer for the happily-ever-after stories of cats being adopt-

ed. Being a no-kill shelter (a shelter that does not euthanize except for extreme behavior and/or health reasons), space is precious at the FOPAS cathouse, and cages never remain empty for long.

When asked how current economic conditions have affected the shelter, Sligar says, "Our adoption numbers last year were definitely down." She also notes that more cats have been returned and abandoned in recent months. With a capacity of approximately 65 cats, Sligar regrets having to turn away requests to take in cats. Adding to the challenges faced by the feline side of FOPAS — plans for a new, bigger shelter are being complicated by unexpected expenses connected to the proposed building site.

Despite the hurdles faced by Sligar and her team, it is clear they see hope and joy in each adoption and foster placement. Another source of determination for the FOPAS cat crew is their trap, neuter, and release program. Those cats you see roaming your neighborhood or in the local green space are very likely part of a feral colony, cats living and breeding in the

wild. Sligar acknowledges that many people just want these cats "gone," but she asserts that killing or relocating feral cats is not a sensible solution.

Considering that two unaltered cats and all their descendants can theoretically number 420,000 cats in just seven years, Sligar and the FOPAS cat volunteers find great satisfaction in humanely trapping feral cats, getting them fixed (with the help of No More Homeless Pets) and releasing them where they were found. These outings are most successful when people take the time to document where and when feral cats are gathering before reporting it to FOPAS.

As this interview comes to a close, the busy season for cats and kittens is just beginning. The cathouse is in great need of basic cat supplies and also volunteers who can give the gift of time. Endless snuggles with the likes of long-timer Hogan will be your payment, and it is a royal payment, indeed.

