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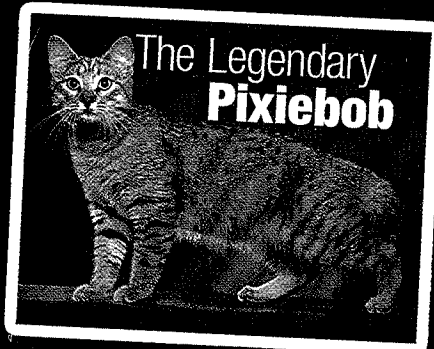
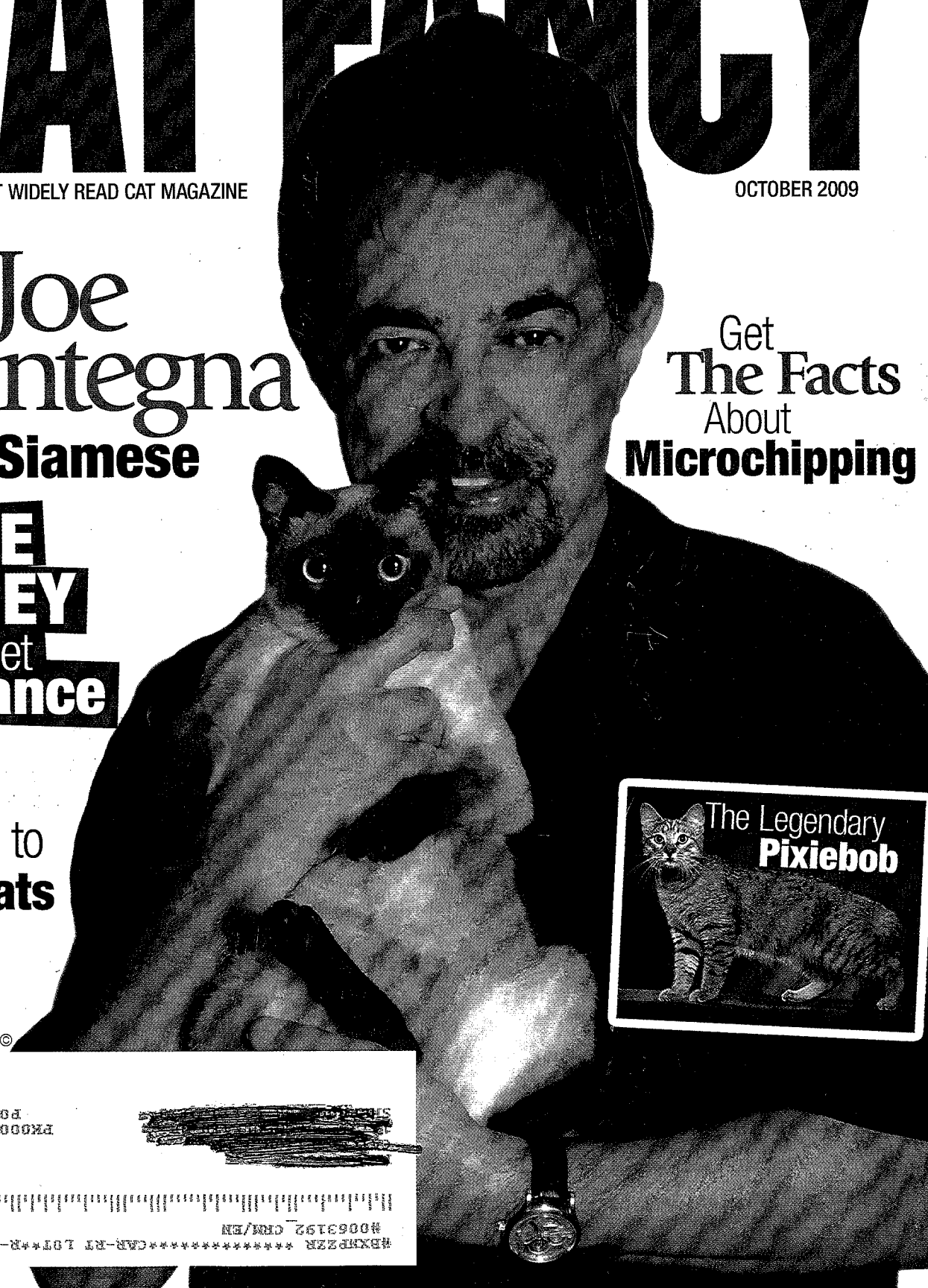
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Lucky Luigi

A shelter's black cat adoption program helps a forgotten feline find a home.

BY POLINA OLSEN

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This issue's Rescuer of the Month will receive Cat Attract cat litter, courtesy of Precious Cat. For more information, visit www.preciouscat.com.

With his leash and his harness, Luigi relished his daily morning walk with shelter volunteers — a much-needed change of scenery. One of the shelter's longest staying residents, Luigi often waited while people walked by his golden eyes and sweet meows. In Oregon and around the country, black cats are the last to find homes.

"This is a constant issue," says Kathy Covey, public relations and marketing manager for the Cat Adoption Team's (CAT) no-kill shelter in Sherwood, Ore. Luigi and other black cats make up the largest segment of CAT's population. In 2008, CAT found homes for 3,250 cats. Of those, about 733 were black or black-and-white.

"Black cats are here longer, so it looks like we have a lot," Covey says. "It could have something to do with superstition. But, when [adopters] walk around the shelter and see so many black cats, a different color breaks the monotony and gets noticed."

CAT volunteer Sally Newton agrees. "People say a lot of things, but it boils down to [this]: There are so many black cats, and although people usually don't say it, some worry about superstitions. I remind them that, in many countries, black cats are good luck."

Determined to solve the problem, Covey, Newton and other volunteers started Black Cat Adopt-A-Thons. They timed the first event to coincide with the opening of the movie "The Dark Knight" in July 2008.

"[The movie] played in the lobby, and we offered a discount on our dark kitties," Covey says. Complete with decorations and costumed staff, the event worked like a charm. "[Then] we had Black Cat Friday after Thanksgiving and Be in the Black by Tax Day in early April. We convince people to consider a black cat. They may not end up adopting one, but when we have



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEBBIE BRUSIUS/CAT ADOPTION TEAM

Above: Luigi.

Left: Sherri Walker in costume for Dark Night



clever marketing, they come in."

Newton says that when the shelter has specials, black cats are 50 percent off. "First, people look at the cats because they're on sale. Then, they see the kitty inside the coat."

One such adopter was Brittany Hassell who left Alaska for Oregon last August. By November, the full-time student yearned for a feline friend.

"I wanted to give a cat a good home," she says. Soon, she heard about Black Cat Friday.

At first Hassell didn't see Luigi.

"He was high up in the kitty room, slumped in his bed," she says. "He was like a little wet noodle, so laid-back and mellow. Then, he showed me his teeth. He looked like a buck-toothed kitty."

Today, Luigi loves to talk.

"When he's hungry it sounds like he's shouting 'Mom,'" Hassell says. He still loves morning walks and often naps on his favorite couch. "He puts his arm around things. It looks like he's hugging the cushions and pillows. Brushing him makes him so happy. He's very well loved." ○

Polina Olsen is a freelance writer living in Portland, Ore., with her husband Andy, Somali Koshka and Tonkinese Baba Ganoush.



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