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Best friends

[Janie Nafsinger](#) - 10/03/05

## *Senior pets and older humans can be a good match, and two local animal shelters help bring them together*

Yes, kittens and puppies are adorable, Lita and Joe Doran agree. But the West Slope couple, who have always had pets, decided against bringing any more baby animals into their lives after their 20-year-old cat, Flora, died last year. One year earlier, they'd lost their other cat, Fauna, who also was about 20.

The Dorans decided that at their age — Lita is 68, Joe is 69 — "we couldn't make another commitment of 20 years," Lita explains. So they decided to adopt adult cats rather than kittens.

Now the Dorans have Ellis, a gregarious 13-year-old orange shorthair who runs to the door to greet a human visitor and jumps up on the living room table, eye to eye with the stranger, so he can touch noses. They also have Toby, a shy 12-year-old Siamese male, and Sterling, an American shorthair who at age 4 is the baby of the family.

The Dorans adopted all three male cats in May at Animal Aid, a no-kill animal shelter in Southwest Portland that recently began a program to encourage senior humans to adopt senior animals — in the case of cats, 8 years old and above.

Another local no-kill animal shelter, the Cat Adoption Team in Sherwood — known as CAT — runs a similar program called Mature Companions, which offers reduced adoption fees and other benefits to people who adopt senior pets.

"An older cat will be more relaxed and companionable," says Joene Pike, Animal Aid's director of operations.

Older cats also are less active, "and the advantage is you already know the personality of the cat," Pike adds.

Another reason older adults prefer to adopt older cats and dogs is they're concerned about what will happen to the animals if they outlive their human companions, Pike says. Many of the older animals come from homes where the previous owners move or become too ill to care for them.

In the case of the Dorans' cats, Ellis and Toby grew up together in the same home, but the woman who'd raised them no longer could care for them. Sterling was a feral kitten who was raised at Animal Aid until the Dorans took him in.

"The house was so empty without our babies," Lita says, recalling the loss of Flora and Fauna. "This house was so quiet. It's a presence that you don't know until it's gone. Boy, does this house ever have a heartbeat again."



Photo by Jim Clark

## **Pets are good for you**

Having a pet can help ease loneliness, depression, even physical ailments in people, studies have shown.

"There are so many benefits to the senior human. It improves mental and physical health," says Britta Bavaresco, a CAT board member and former director of the organization.

On the flip side, adopted cats spend less time at the shelter, "decreasing the chance of the cat being depressed," Bavaresco adds.

Older cats often are viewed as being too old to be adopted, "especially when they have to compete with kittens," Bavaresco notes. "But when you look at the life expectancy of an indoor cat — 15 to 20 years, compared to outdoor cats, which average five to seven years — an older cat could be around a long time."

CAT and Animal Aid both look for indoor-only homes for the animals in their care. "We do the best we can to make sure the match is right between the cat and the person," says Pike of Animal Aid. "And a lot of times, the cat is going to pick you."

Evan Kalik, president and founder of CAT, has 12 cats of his own, most of them 15 or more years old. "The hardest part for them was a couple of whippersnappers we brought in," Kalik recalls with a grin, "but it's OK now."

Having older animals can mean more medical bills — several cats at the Kalik home are on medication — but that comes with the territory .

"There's a price to pay for love," Kalik says. "Love doesn't come cheap, whether it's animals or people."

## **Bet for the pets**

Animal Aid's first fund-raiser is Saturday, Oct. 22, from 7:30 to 11 p.m. "Bet for the Pets" will be a casino night at the Sweetbrier Inn in Tualatin. Tickets are \$30.

### **Animal Aid Inc.**

**335 S.W. 42nd Ave.**

**Portland 97221**

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**E-mail:** [contact@animalaidpdx.org](mailto:contact@animalaidpdx.org)

**Web site:** [www.AnimalAidPDX.org](http://www.AnimalAidPDX.org)

Founded in 1969, Animal Aid helps abused, homeless, injured and sick animals; promotes and encourages altering of all pets to reduce and prevent overpopulation; and finds homes for animals in its care. In May, the organization moved into a new shelter that houses about 62 cats; another 60 cats and three or four dogs live in foster care. Animal Aid is supported solely by donations and charges no adoption fees.

### **Cat Adoption Team (CAT)**

**14175 S.W. Galbreath Drive**

**Sherwood 97140**

**Phone:** 503-925-8803

**Web site:** [www.catadoptionteam.org](http://www.catadoptionteam.org)

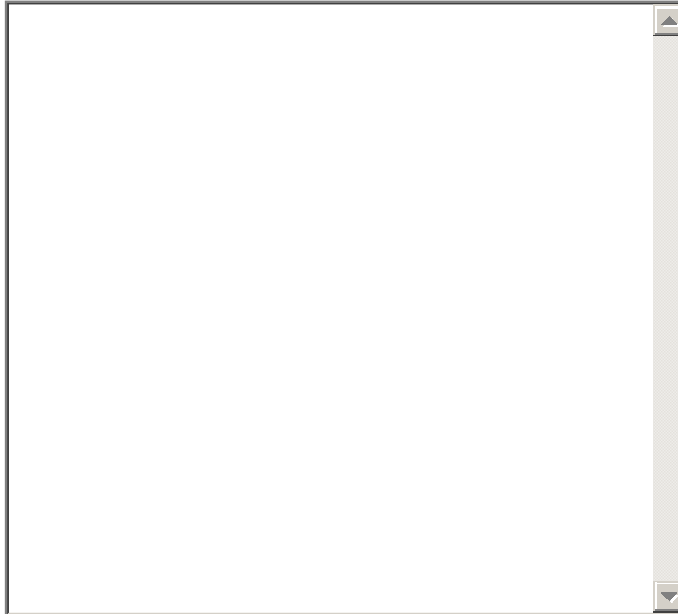
Based in Sherwood, CAT is Oregon's largest non-profit no-kill cat shelter and hospital. Founder and president Evan Kalik opened CAT in 1998. The shelter usually houses about 250 cats, while another 250 or 300 live in foster homes and about 50 others stay at offsite locations such as PetSmart, Kalik says.

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