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Shelter is the cat's meow but needs a makeover

Nonprofit - The Cat Adoption Team hopes supporters will help it win \$1 million

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The Cat Adoption Team has grown too busy for its shelter in Sherwood, so it's turned to an Internet contest for a makeover worth as much as \$1 million.

The contest sponsored by the pet-centric Web site www.zootoo.com awards points to shelters whose supporters sign up for membership, write product reviews or download photos. The top winner receives a \$1 million makeover, while shelters that finish in the top 20 also will get financial help to improve their shelters and services.

No matter how the Cat Adoption Team fares in the contest, supporters say the 9-year-old charity must improve the layout of its shelter to better serve the public. The shelter needs to improve the flow of services from adoption counseling to spay/neuter assistance to surgery and clinical care.

"Great things happen in this building," said Kathy Covey, a spokeswoman for the nonprofit shelter. "But this building has been Band-Aided together to become a shelter."

A remodel project is inevitable and may have to count on donations and grants, Covey said.

"But we'd love to have the money from the contest," she said.

The Cat Adoption Team was founded in 1998 when it placed 218 cats and kittens in homes. It is the largest nonprofit, no-kill, cat-only shelter in the Northwest. The shelter has grown more than 1,300 percent since it opened, with 3,129 cats and kittens adopted in 2007.

Since its start, the shelter has operated out of a blue-and-gray building in a business park off the Tualatin-Sherwood Highway. The space was designed for a wholesale fireplace business and much of the retrofitted interior remains a maze of hallways, small offices and larger spaces.

Some of the shelter -- a retail store, rooms for kittens and mother cats -- is on the main floor. Other services -- the main cages and rooms for adult cats, the clinic, a surgery room -- are up a narrow staircase. The shelter building also includes extensive warehouse space that is used to store pallets of food, crates and other goods. Part of the warehouse is rented out.

Thirty full-time and part-time staffers work at the shelter. About 360 volunteers give their time, caring for a daily population of about 250 cats and kittens.

The building is so cramped that even during a quiet weekday morning, staffers had to turn sideways to pass each other in the hall. On surgery days, crates are stacked in a line with cats awaiting spaying or neutering -- and cats recovering from the procedures.

In the visiting area, some cages are showing their age and heavy use.

"We want to make it more customer friendly, but also make it easier for staff to take care of the kitties," said Ed Pashkin, operations manager for the shelter. "Flow is difficult."

In addition to its usual shelter services, the team also will sponsor subsidized spay/neuters for qualified cat owners in a "fix-a-thon" in February. The service will cost \$20 for spaying and \$10 for neutering for cats at least 10 weeks old, 21/2 pounds and healthy. Feral cats are not allowed.

Appointments are available at 503-925-8903.

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