Success!
Annual Report

High Fliers
Buckley the Hearing Dog

Taking Care
Amazing Cat Karma

Are You Serious?
Devoted Volunteers

Foster kitten Fiona
Macy’s Magic for SF/SPCA Animals

Come one, come all to Macy’s Union Square. You’ll see adorable cats, dogs, kittens and puppies at play inside huge snow globes set among San Francisco landmarks, from the Golden Gate Bridge to Twin Peaks. It’s a delightful winter wonderland created by Macy’s for The San Francisco SPCA’s 21st annual Holiday Windows Adoption event. ★ These windows provide all the “creature comforts” for the animals, including temperature control, hidden litter boxes, and comfy spots for those quick catnaps. ★ Come on down to see for yourself! And help us find homes and raise funds by volunteering for a two-hour shift at Macy’s. Sign up at www.sfspca.org. Questions? Email windowsvolunteer@sfspca.org or call (415) 554-3007. ★ Plus, visit www.sfspca.org to watch live webcam footage of the animals in Macy’s Holiday Windows.

Windows sponsored by:
Dear Friend,

It was a momentous occasion when we celebrated the groundbreaking for the construction of the Leanne B. Roberts Animal Care Center. Marley and Quinn, two animal shelter alumni, gave new meaning to the term “breaking ground” by literally digging up the first spadesful of earth, to the crowd’s delight.

It will be doubly exciting for us to see an ordinary warehouse transformed into a modern veterinary hospital because, while the scope of The SF/SPCA’s charitable medical care has expanded exponentially over the years, our old medical building itself, constructed in 1932, definitely has not. That’s about to change in a very big way.

When completed, the Leanne B. Roberts Animal Care Center will double our ability to care for sick animals and increase the number of animals we can spay and neuter. Finally, our non-profit, full-service hospital, shelter medicine program and free Feral Fix will be under one roof.

■ Looking back on the 12 months that ended June 30th, it was another extraordinary year for The SF/SPCA as our programs and services helped thousands of homeless animals directly and aided many thousands more with medical financial assistance. Not to mention our Animal Assisted Therapy Program, Humane Education Program, Hearing Dog Program, and more. I’m delighted to share all the good news with you in our annual report.

■ The San Francisco Bay Area earned another national First Place this year, due in good measure to those very same SF/SPCA services. The Humane Index, created by The Humane Society of the United States, ranked the country’s 25 largest metropolitan areas and declared ours the most humane region in the nation.

■ Proving that very point, right now you can see our adorable, adoptable animals at Macy’s Union Square during the 21st edition of our Holiday Windows adoption campaign. Macy’s designers never hold back with their fanciful and clever displays, so don’t miss it. We expect to find homes for about 200 animals.

■ Can anything top all this activity? Yes! Next year is The SF/SPCA’s 140th birthday. We’ll be celebrating all year long with special observances and events, and I hope you make a New Year’s resolution to get more involved with The SF/SPCA during this anniversary year. An easy way to celebrate is with a special 140th-year contribution to the animals of $140 via an automatic credit card or bank account donation of $12 a month (that’s just 40 cents a day).

However you choose to be involved (for example, by attending a seminar or adopting an animal, or encouraging a neighbor or friend to do so), I hope you can experience some aspect of The SF/SPCA in person so you can see what your dollars are doing – and the remarkable difference those donations are making in the lives of San Francisco’s animals. Thank you for your kindness and generosity; your support makes a difference every day for the animals in our care at The SF/SPCA.

For the animals,

– Jan McHugh-Smith,
President, SF/SPCA
Contents

The mission of The San Francisco SPCA is to save and protect animals, to provide care and treatment, to advocate for their welfare, and to enhance the human-animal bond.

6 Breaking New Ground
Construction begins on our new medical center

8 Are You Serious?
Devoted Volunteers

13 High Fliers
Buckley the Hearing Dog

18 Success!
SF/SPCA Annual Report

26 Taking Care
Amazing Cat Karma

On the Cover: Last year The San Francisco SPCA's Foster Program saved more than 800 animals – about one-fourth of all our adoptions. Tender, loving home care provided by volunteer foster parents ensures that very young animals like Fiona emerge healthy, friendly and frisky, ready for permanent homes of their own. Photo by Charlotte Fiorito, fioritophoto.com.

Pet Press

- Comcast on Demand
  Adoptable dogs and cats

- FETCH The Paper
  Pets of the Month & Event Listings

- KSFO 560 AM
  Weekday mornings around 8:40 am

- KGO Channel 7 Morning News
  Third Friday of the month around 11:25 am

- San Francisco Advertiser
  10 Pets of the Week

- San Francisco Bay Guardian
  Featured Pet of the Week

- Marina Times
  Pet of the Month & “Kibble & Bits” column

- Noevalley.com
  10 pets of the week

- KOIT 96.5 FM Website
  Pet of the Week

- The City Star
  Pet Corner

AnimalUpdate

- KCBS All News 740 AM
  Sunday: 1:35 pm, 3:36 pm, 9:22 pm.
  Monday: 1:53 am
Gifts from The SF/SPCA
for all the cats, dogs and animal-loving people on your list

All proceeds help SF/SPCA animals. Shop at Maddie's Pet Adoption Center, open open 11 a.m. – 6 p.m. seven days a week (except holidays) or online at our E-store, www.sfspca.org.

SF/SPCA Foster Kitten Calendar
Twelve months of cuteness, just $10

Kitty Noodle
Simple, safe and great fun, 4 for $16

Foster Care Poster
Ingenious and delightful poster uses 900 photos of foster kittens. Printed on heavy paper, 24” x 36”. $15

PLUS ■ books by SF/SPCA authors ■ SF/SPCA clothing: hat, vest, T-shirts, more ■ Quick-draw dog treat training pouch ■ Video catnip DVD ■ and lots more
Two former shelter dogs, Marley (a black Labrador/Great Dane mix) and Quinn (a yellow Labrador/retriever mix) turned the first symbolic pawfuls of earth at the ground-breaking ceremony for The Leanne B. Roberts Animal Care Center on October 4th. Cheered on by over 200 guests, including the entire staff of The San Francisco SPCA, the two dogs, outfitted in construction vests, enthusiastically went to work, showering dignitaries with excavated dirt!

The dogs were the highlight of a moving ceremony honoring the late Mrs. Leanne Roberts, after whom the Animal Care Center is named. Speakers paid tribute to Mrs. Roberts’ love of animals, and her vision and generosity.

After a champagne toast to the future success of the new Animal Care Center, and a blessing by Franciscan Father Jorge Hernandez from St. Boniface Church – October 4th was the Feast of St. Francis, the patron saint of animals and San Francisco – guests surveyed the spacious, echoing site while munching on light refreshments, including bone-shaped sugar cookies.

The Leanne B. Roberts Animal Care Center will replace The SF/SPCA’s aging and inadequate Community Veterinary Hospital, built in 1932. The Animal Care Center is being constructed in an existing building adjacent to Maddie’s Pet Adoption Center. The facility is designed by award-winning Rauhaus Freedenthal & Associates, and the local architect is Korth Sunseri Architects. Construction management is by Van Acker Construction and the general contractor is Plant Construction Company. When completed in 2009, the $29.9 million, 60,000-square-foot facility will be the second largest veterinary hospital in North America, and will be number one in the size of its medical area. It will also incorporate many “green” features:

**Green Elements:**
- The architects will reuse the external envelope of the building, which will create savings on materials and energy, and eliminate waste. The exterior walls will be insulated for energy efficiency.
- Energy-efficient glazing (glass) will be used on the front entrance of the building. The main entrance will feature a huge skylight at its center.
- Because of the animals, all of the air going into the facility will be fresh air from the outside and not re-circulated. The system uses a “heat recovery system” that, at night and on cool days, will route the heat the system gives off through a coil system and heat the incoming air, saving energy and energy costs.
All the mill-work (woodwork) is a Certified Renewable Resource. For every tree that is used to create woodwork in the facility, another tree is planted.

All the refrigerators and freezers will be purchased new and will all meet the “Energy Star” rating, as will all of the overhead lighting in the facility.

**Medical Elements:**

- The Leanne B. Roberts Animal Care Center will have 17 spacious consulting and examination rooms, in both the primary care hospital and shelter medicine department, with in-room computer systems for immediate, electronic patient record retrieval, display of radiographs and client continuing education.
- Two modern hospital surgery rooms with state-of-the-art surgical lighting will be adjacent to the main treatment complex and intensive-care ward.
- An intensive-care ward with telemetry for monitoring vital signs of critical patients and temperature regulated oxygen cases will help save lives.
- A double surgery room suite for Spay and Neuter will double the surgical capacity of the existing Spay/Neuter Clinic.
- Multiple isolation and quarantine wards for felines and canines will improve disease control and treatment.
- The facility will have upgraded, state-of-the-art ultrasound equipment.
- Direct digital radiology and dental radiology will replace film-based radiology, eliminating chemical film processing, enhancing worker safety and improving image quality.
- Two modern in-house laboratory rooms will accommodate diagnostic equipment to aid rapid diagnosis and treatment of shelter and hospital patients.
- The Leanne B. Roberts Animal Care Center will provide a separate entrance and housing for the Feral Cat Assistance Program. There will also be the ability to utilize a surgery room, separate from the general population; currently, the Feral Cat Program shares space with the general public.

The Leanne B. Roberts Animal Care Center will significantly expand the services that The SF/SPCA offers for companion animals in San Francisco. With its advanced, world-class capabilities it will enable The SF/SPCA to further develop the lifesaving work that has been its hallmark since 1868.

If you wish to contribute to The Leanne B. Roberts Animal Care Center, please contact SF/SPCA Development Director Mary Casey at marycasey@sfspca.org or (415) 554-3025. Your donation will help save the lives of countless dogs and cats far into the future.

Catherine B. Brown, Chair of The SF/SPCA Board of Directors; Eric B. Roberts, Mrs. Roberts’ son and an SF/SPCA board member; Dr. Jack Aldridge, Director of Veterinary Services at The SF/SPCA; California Assemblyman Mark Leno; and Jan McHugh-Smith, President of The SF/SPCA.

Quinn barks his approval.
Sure, Saturdays at The San Francisco SPCA are busy, but this is ridiculous. At least 90 people are surging through the lobby of Maddie’s Pet Adoption Center, flowing from the cat side to the dog side (and vice-versa) like bubbles in a pot of boiling water. Clearly they’re animal enthusiasts because they’re smiling broadly as they look at the cats and dogs, saying “awwww” and making kissy faces through the glass.

Everyone in this room wants to be a San Francisco SPCA volunteer. Marc wants to be “part of giving more cats a better life.” Lisa, a dog lover who lives in a no-dogs apartment, needs her dog fix. Collin, along with his 110-pound mix of mastiff and Labrador, Ben, wants to join the Animal Assisted Therapy program. So do Mari and her dog, Kenta. “He loves people,” she says. And Jay, a full-time graduate student, knows how to spell relief from the stress of his studies: being with animals.

Perhaps a crowd this large and energetic is to be expected because this gathering is the first new-volunteer orientation of 2007, with many people no doubt striving to fulfill their New Year’s resolutions.

Except that a turnout like this isn’t unusual. The SF/SPCA generally holds two to three orientations each month, and while attendance occasionally dips to 50, 75-100 is closer to the average.

It’s not surprising. Tally up all the people who work or volunteer at The San Francisco SPCA and at San Francisco Animal Care and Control (and who talk with justifiable pride about their work), and add to that number all the supporters of the two organizations, and the result is a lot of powerful, local, word-of-mouth advertising. Now mix in the extraordinary variety of opportunities available to volunteers, including Animal Assisted Therapy, classroom visits, dog training, feral cat assistance and at-home foster care, as well as in-shelter socializing of cats and dogs. Then throw in San Francisco’s international reputation as an animal-friendly town with the nation’s leading save rate for homeless cats and dogs, and it’s easy to understand why those orientation sessions can fill up fast. But appearances can be deceiving.

“Actually, it’s not that easy for us to recruit and keep new volunteers,” explains SF/SPCA Volunteer Services Director Tina High. “We ask for a big commitment, three hours a week for six months, and a lot...
of people can’t do that.”


Consider that in any one year, about 10% of the American population moves. That statistic is startling enough, but in San Francisco the turnover tempo is about double the national rate. Though the frenzy of the Gold Rush is history, San Francisco retains its allure as a place to start over. People really do come and go. Relationships change. Jobs change. The Bay Area’s mild weather and political climate draw people in, the high cost of living here drives people away.

There’s also the quite reasonable perception about animal-related volunteer work that there’s not all that much to it. How difficult can it be, after all, to stroke a cat or walk a dog?

Well, at The San Francisco SPCA you’ll need to clock at least a dozen hours of instruction and practice before we “unleash” you to simply walk a dog. Many people find that intimidating; some may even think it insulting.

On the other hand, SF/SPCA course offerings for volunteers read like a college catalog. You can learn an extraordinary amount about animal behavior and training techniques, all tuition-free. And it’s a quality education.

One recent morning Mollie Tunks – a graduate of The SF/SPCA’s Academy for Dog Trainers who was voted the Bay Guardian’s “best small-dog trainer” award in 2005 and who is now an SF/SPCA employee – was conducting a class on the balcony of Maddie’s Pet Adoption Center. Mollie’s five human students were working with – uh, trying to work with – Sadie, a shelter dog who clearly hadn’t had much, if any, practice with obedience work and who was far more tuned in to the noisily flapping pigeons alighting enticingly on the railing.

The day’s lesson: luring a dog into a “sit,” followed by a “down.” It’s not hard; it’s also not easy, especially with a distracted dog. Mollie demonstrated a couple of times, first catching the dog’s attention, then rewarding Sadie at just the right moments to produce the desired behaviors. Then Mollie coached the students individually until each person felt comfortable and confident. (Sadie, meantime, was catching on that humans really do have something to offer: treats!)

People with this kind of hands-on experience really know their stuff. Even if their volunteer tenure gets cut short because they have to move to St. Louis to chase a career opportunity, many will leave The SF/SPCA with a solid background in animal relations, and they’ll likely carry a new, from-the-animal’s point of view with them wherever they go. That can only be good.

So SF/SPCA staffers Tina and Norma aren’t impressed by a big crowd. Because they’re focused on the long-term, they’re much less interested in quantity than in quality. “Fifty people may show up at an orientation,” says Tina. “If we get five good people out of it, that’s well worth it.”

The SF/SPCA invests heavily in volunteers. As a result, in Tina’s words, “We have amazing volunteers who give and give and give.” (A long list of them can be found following this article.)

The bottom line: we expect you to be as serious as we are about helping the animals. So, if you’d like to sign up at The San Francisco SPCA to pet kitties or walk doggies, we welcome you, applaud your generous impulse and appreciate your valuable help. Now, here’s your textbook, your first homework assignment and your first take-home quiz.
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Success!

The San Francisco SPCA’s most recent year can be summarized in two words: No letup. 🐾 We spayed or neutered more animals this year than we did a dozen years ago, including more than twice as many feral cats. 🐾 The amount of subsidized medical care we gave the community was nearly triple the amount of 12 years ago. 🐾 A dozen years ago we were making plans for the most advanced animal adoption building anywhere, Maddie’s Pet Adoption Center. This year we finalized plans for the most ambitious project in SF/SPCA history, a veterinary medical facility like no other, the Leanne B. Roberts Animal Care Center. 🐾 Mind you, The SF/SPCA is not a national group, does not have millions of members, relies on no “parent” association, and receives no government money. Yet our local organization continues to set the pace in animal welfare. How can that be? 🐾 The answer can be summarized in one word: You. Everyone who contributes to The SF/SPCA believes in doing the best for our animals. We don’t have room to list all our supporters, but if you’re reading this, you’re probably one of them. The SF/SPCA’s multiplicity of services – all our programs that heal and take care of animals, and that educate and enlighten people about animals – exist and continue to grow thanks only to your help. 🐾 The SF/SPCA’s agenda for the new year? With your support, no letup!
The San Francisco SPCA found **new homes for 3,217 cats and dogs** last year. Almost 3/4 of those animals were originally sheltered by San Francisco Animal Care and Control, then transferred to The SF/SPCA for rehabilitation and adoption. The partnership between these two agencies, one public and one private, guarantees a home for every adoptable dog and cat in San Francisco and stands as a national model. The adoption total for both agencies was 4,409. Most of The SF/SPCA’s guests are cats, and our **Cat Behavior Department** works with the animals and guardians to prevent or solve common behavior problems.

The SF/SPCA’s **Spay/Neuter Clinic** provided 6,500 low-cost or zero-cost surgeries last year, including free services for 1,132 feral cats and 1,118 animals at San Francisco Animal Care and Control.
Nurtured in the homes of volunteers until they could be adopted, 803 underage, sick or injured animals, mostly kittens, benefitted from SF/SPCA Foster Care. The SF/SPCA supplied food, medications and veterinary care to animals looked after by 112 foster parents.

The SF/SPCA’s Community Animal Hospital, granted the highest possible ranking by the American Animal Hospital Association, provided veterinary care to 19,700 cats and dogs. Well over 50% of our hospital’s private clientele received financial aid directly from The SF/SPCA, including pet guardians who are part of our Pet-A-Care, Emergency Care Fund and Senior Partnerships programs.
Financial Overview
Total expenses for the year ending June 30, 2007: $13,324,182

Community Veterinary Services
Total: $5,188,209
Outpatient Services
Community Animal Hospital
Inpatient Services
Low-cost Spay/Neuter Clinic
Shelter Animal Medical Care
Companion Animal Programs
Total: $4,443,677
Adoption Programs
Behavior and Training
Hearing Dog Program
Support Services
Total: $972,429
Humane Education
Animal Assisted Therapy
Public Information
Public Education Programs
Total: $2,719,867
Development
Finance
Human Resources
Facilities
Administration
Support Services
Total: $5,188,209
Services
Community Veterinary Services
Companion Animal Programs

Beyond the expense figures above, The San Francisco SPCA last year provided our community’s animals with charitable medical services worth $1,312,850.
The SF/SPCA Animal Assisted Therapy Program brought the gentle presence of animals to nursing homes, psychiatric clinics, senior centers and special schools throughout the city. Some 83 animal/person teams, nearly all of them volunteers, made more than a thousand free visits, reaching 27,650 clients.

Under the direction of internationally known dog-training expert Jean Donaldson, The SF/SPCA Academy for Dog Trainers graduated 40 more students. While enrolled in the Academy’s rigorous six-week course of study, students coach dogs at Maddie’s Pet Adoption Center to better prepare them for adoption. In addition, about 1,000 local dogs went through classes taught by our Department of Dog Behavior and Training. SF/SPCA trainers also rehabilitated shelter dogs with behavior problems and worked with the dogs’ new adopters to ensure happy co-existence.
The SF/SPCA’s Humane Education Program reached thousands of young people via school visits, field trips, animal-related community service projects and workshops. Some 140 lucky youngsters, chosen by lottery, took part in weeklong, animal-intensive Summer Camps.

Recruiting homeless dogs from animal shelters all over Northern California, The SF/SPCA Hearing Dog Program taught the canines to respond to everyday sounds and placed them with deaf and hearing-impaired people, essentially without charge. Since inception, the Program has trained and placed 799 dogs.

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Ms. Anya-Malka Halevi
Ms. De Etta M. Hall
Mr. and Mrs. Robert F. Happ
Ms. Silvia Harris-Payne
Ms. Judith Hedberg
Ms. Ina D. Henderson
Ms. Nancy L. Henry

Winter 2008 | www.sfspca.org | SF/SPCA | Our Animals 23
Serving throughout the organization, hundreds upon hundreds of SF/SPCA volunteers donated 114,314 hours to dog and cat behavior counseling, foster care, adoption counseling, Animal Assisted Therapy, Humane Education, feral cat assistance and medical care. The SF/SPCA would not be what it is without the priceless help of volunteers.

For the 89th year, The SF/SPCA Police Horse Retirement Ranch provided quiet sanctuary for all horses retired from active duty. The animals receive lifetime accommodations (indoors and outdoors), food and medical care at no cost to the city.

The SF/SPCA Public Information department worked with local media to publicize available pets and to disseminate animal knowledge, replied to animal-related inquiries from the public, maintained the popular SF/SPCA Web site, gave tours to people from all over the world, and put on special events.
Good for You! And for Animals!
Welcome to The San Francisco SPCA’s Land of Easy Giving

Help Our Animals Find the Road Home

Donate your car to The San Francisco SPCA
Call 1-866-473-7722.

Our car donation agency, Car Program LLC, will help make your tax-deductible car donation to The SF/SPCA quick and easy. Your car doesn’t have to be in working order and it generally can be picked up at any location. Call 1-866-473-7722 toll-free.

(Problems? Contact Claire St. Romain at (415) 554-3072 or cstromain@sfspca.org.)

Got Stuff?
Your used goods will do great things for animals!

Stock TIP
Don’t sell stock or mutual fund shares. Rather, transfer them to The SF/SPCA. There is no capital gains tax, the full amount is also tax-deductible, and more of your money goes to work helping our animals. Another tip: When you do this, please tell us. We’ve recently received a few gifts of stock, but we have no idea from whom!

Call Eliza Edelman at The SF/SPCA, (415) 554-3549 or eedelman@sfspca.org.

BART Tickets for Animals
Do you have a collection of leftover BART tickets with just a dime or two on them?

Send them to The San Francisco SPCA. The SF/SPCA can redeem the tickets, and spend the money caring for animals. Deposit your tiny tickets in the special jars at The SF/SPCA or use the envelope at page 16. Every little bit helps when an animal is looking for a ticket to a new home!

Your second-hand stuff – clothing, toys, collectibles, record albums, furniture and office equipment – can do great things for animals.

Donate your used, salable goods to the Community Thrift Store, and when the store sells them, part of the proceeds will go to The San Francisco SPCA.

It’s a whole lot easier than a garage sale, and you get a tax deduction for your donated items. Plus, it’s a fantastic deal for the animals. During one recent year, The SF/SPCA’s homeless cats and dogs got $14,000 this way.

For details, contact San Francisco’s Community Thrift Store directly (open 7 days a week), and tell them you want your stuff to fetch funds for The SF/SPCA. The store is at 623 Valencia St.

Your used goods will do great things for animals! Call the store today at (415) 861-4910.
There are people who are OK with cats, and there are true cat people. To find out what kind of cat person you are, take this personality test: Imagine it’s a beautiful, quiet weekend morning and you have the Sunday paper spread out on your dining room table. Along with the satisfying hot cup of tea (or coffee or cocoa) that you sip periodically, shafts of sunlight soothingly enter the room from a window, and you’re immersed in an article about scuba diving in tropical Costa Rica. The captivating descriptions have you swimming along in bathtub-temperature water where schools of fish assume ever-changing fantastic forms while you drift through an enthralling and undulating world bursting with sharp hues of silver, blue, orange –

Suddenly the cat jumps up on the table. You’re startled out of your underwater reverie as the animal’s fuzzy tail quickly brushes your face, and in only a moment the cat has settled down on top of your newspaper. What do you do?

The OK-with-cats person gently shoos the cat away or picks up the cat and puts the animal on the floor, saying (with only a hint of bemused impatience), “Oh, you silly cat, do you really need to sit down right now, right here on top of what I’m reading?”

In contrast, the true cat person reacts in a completely different way. The true cat person, though plucked from the warm waters of an imaginary vacation, is nonetheless delighted by this interruption and not only massages the cat behind the ears and under the chin (hoping to elicit a purr), but then, after an appropriate interlude of softly cooing at the cat and gently stroking the animal, allows the cat to rest right there on the Travel section, and (this is the kicker) finds something else to do – but nothing so noisy that it would disturb the cat’s peace and quiet.

Yes, a true cat person differs from the average human. A true cat person pays close attention to a cat’s body language, noting not just the tail but the cat’s posture and facial features: ears, eyes and even whiskers.

The true cat person accommodates him- or herself to the cat. Always eager to pet or play with a feline, a true cat person nevertheless gives the animal plenty of “space” and knows instinctively not to approach the cat but to let the cat take the initiative. The true cat person displays patience that many people simply don’t comprehend – for example, adopting a shy adult feline and waiting three months for the animal to feel comfortable enough to emerge from under the couch.

Perhaps most important, a true cat person is actually attracted to “difficult” felines. Such a human finds an aloof, timid, or scared feline intriguing, even inviting.

True cat people often look after feral cats, for instance. Feral cats readily accept and consume scrumptious servings of canned cat food as long as no one is nearby. The true cat person offers these meals over and over for months until one day when the feral cat’s behavior changes ever so slightly. The animal does not immediately bolt upon seeing the person, but lingers and eats – constantly looking up suspiciously – despite the human standing 15 feet distant. For the true cat person, that’s the reward. Not that the cat shows gratitude or affection. Just that the cat displays barely enough trust that it doesn’t run away. For a cat person, that’s enough. In fact, a cat person takes that as a compliment.

Confronted with a socially reluctant feline, true cat people seem to say to themselves, “No matter what you do, I’m going to win you over.” It’s a kind of acceptance and indulgence and determination – a
form of love, actually, mysterious and immeasurable, yet real.

It was in November of 2000 that Elizabeth Bernard came to The San Francisco SPCA to adopt a cat. She met a tortoiseshell cat named Kali, soon fell in love with her and adopted her without a moment’s hesitation. A longtime resident of San Francisco and a teacher in the Oakland School District at the time, Elizabeth says that Kali was a very special cat, who “just sort of ruled.” Even so, Elizabeth adored her temperamental kitty. “She’d be purring happily, suddenly chomp my arm, and continue purring, snuggled next to me,” Elizabeth laughs wryly.

Only a true cat person would talk this way – or tolerate such behavior.

Kali needed that kind of adopter because she wasn’t just for anybody. She was almost suitable for nobody. Around five years old when she arrived at The SF/SPCA, Kali was named after Kali-Ma, in Hindu mythology a fearful-looking goddess associated with death and destruction. An imperious goddess in her own right, Kali remained at The SF/SPCA for 11 long months.

And Kali’s SF/SPCA tenure might have been even longer without the extraordinary work of SF/SPCA volunteer Loretta Padilla.

Loretta began volunteering at The SF/SPCA not long after her employer, Western Airlines, merged with Delta Airlines, giving Loretta the chance to take early retirement, which offered her the time to do something she really enjoyed — working with animals. Loretta quickly established herself as a committed volunteer in The SF/SPCA Cat Behavior Department.

She took as much training as possible so she could advance to working with more challenging and special-needs kitties, and she excelled at her vocation. Loretta did pretty much everything. Besides working one-on-one with the “tough” cats, she helped the behavior staff evaluate cats and even taught classes to less experienced volunteers. She was completely at ease with the public, so the role of adoption counselor fit her well, too.

Loretta also had a soft spot for “torties” and Kali quickly became Loretta’s favorite feline at the shelter. (Needless to say, only a true cat person would select such a favorite.) Loretta spent a great deal of time working with this strong-minded feline, soothing and smoothing her unpredictable traits, and Loretta might have adopted Kali herself except that she already had a special-needs feline at home.

Kali actually loved attention, but only on her terms. Loretta visited the cat week
after week, quietly, softly, gently, slowly making incremental progress with Kali’s behavior. While this coddling and accommodation may seem unusual, in fact all homeless cats and dogs at The SF/SPCA receive similar, customized treatment. It’s all part of the grand plan for each animal at Maddie’s Pet Adoption Center. The longer an animal stays with us, the more adoptable that animal becomes.

Still, everyone knew that only a very special someone – a true cat person – could take on Kali and her commanding personality. So when Elizabeth adopted Kali, everyone in the cat realm of The SF/SPCA sighed with relief, though probably no one else felt a sense of satisfaction as deep as Loretta’s.

A few years passed.

In October of 2004, two young cats were brought to The San Francisco SPCA by a rescue group as part of the Society’s collaborative arrangements with other regional animal welfare organizations. The siblings, a tortie female (torties are nearly always females) and a Siamese-mix male, were former feral kittens whom the rescue group had not been able to successfully socialize. And by then, they were about 6-8 months old, past the point of no return for domestication.

“Between four and seven weeks old is ideal,” explains Dilara Parry, Cat Behavior Program coordinator at The SF/SPCA. And between the ages of two and four months, you can still “convert” a feral kitten to a domestic life. Thereafter, things turn dramatically uphill. Between the ages of four and six months, “It’s still possible, but it’ll be a project,” she warns. “You’ll make some progress, but you can’t expect significant change.”

And yet, as Dilara considered these two anti-social felines who were decidedly unfit for adoption, something inside her didn’t want to throw in the towel. “Six months is kind of young to give up on a cat,” she rationalized to herself. Spoken like a true cat person.

So she personally took up the challenge, and brought the sister and brother to her own home to foster. As if she had nothing better to do. Dilara works full-time, so does her husband, and the couple have two young children plus pets, of course. Dilara put each cat in a room by itself and for the next several weeks bribed them in every possible way. No loud noises. No sudden movements. Every visit from any person in the household was calm, predictable, quiet and gentle. Dilara fed the cats baby food (a cat who turns up its nose at shrimp or tuna often succumbs to human baby food). Dilara’s eight-year-old daughter took part, offering interactive toys. Basically, every time a human appeared, something delicious, affectionate or fun happened.

The young boy cat made dramatic progress. He was quite feisty at first, says Dilara; if you approached him, he wouldn’t run away (the typical untamed cat’s response to humans), he’d attack. But after two months of concentrated effort, he turned into an almost mellow little fellow and was soon adopted.

No such luck with his sister, named Oni, who remained on the shy and scared side. Unlike her brother, Oni was never aggressive – she would even approach to be petted – but she never allowed herself to be picked up.

After two months, Dilara felt she had done all she could. And she had succeeded: both cats were now full-grown, yet they were ready to move into Maddie’s Pet Adoption Center. Oni had calmed down; still, she would require a knowledgeable and patient adopter.

By then, Loretta Padilla, whose previous cat had passed away nearly a year before, was searching for another home companion.

Loretta was captivated by this dainty tortie girl with the striking yellow and green eyes and adopted her on December 23, 2004. The two bonded very deeply, and although Oni never liked to be picked up, she would practically hurl herself in front of Loretta to try to prevent her ever leaving her apartment!

Another couple of years went by. Then in March, 2007, the unthinkable happened. Loretta, only in her sixties and still full of energy, passed away.
quite unexpectedly.

The staff at The SF/SPCA and her many volunteer colleagues were shocked and saddened. They banded together to purchase a memorial tile for her to be placed in The Leanne B. Roberts Animal Care Center when it is completed. But their most immediate concern was Oni and what this loss would mean to her.

Fortunately, Loretta, with great wisdom, had enrolled Oni in The SF/SPCA Sido Program, a service that finds new homes for companion animals whose guardians predecease them (see sidebar). Within days of Loretta’s death, the bewildered, now four-year-old Oni was back at Maddie’s Pet Adoption Center, and back, so to speak, in the adoption market. Volunteers went to work to help the traumatized cat recover from the loss of her entire world. It was a lengthy process but, gradually, Oni began to blossom again under the gentle persistence of many caring volunteers.

Oni had been at The SF/SPCA four months when a self-described “tortie person” came looking for a new feline companion. The woman had lost her much-loved kitty to diabetes – as a testament to this human’s devotion and careful nursing, the cat had lived past the age of 12 – and though she grieved for the feline companion she had recently lost, the woman “knew” she needed another kitty.

Clearly, another serious cat person had arrived on the scene. Sure enough, she toured the adoption center and after some time managed to narrow the field to five candidates: two tabbies and three beautiful tortoiseshells.

She then set about learning more about each of these feline finalists. She learned that Oni had been there a long time. Then she was told that Oni’s previous owner, Loretta, had died. Then she found out that Loretta had been an SF/SPCA volunteer and had worked with a cat named Kali.

And that particular piece of information sealed the deal because Kali’s adopter, Elizabeth Bernard, had come back to The SF/SPCA looking for the perfect cat, and now she wasn’t leaving without Oni.

“That did it!” remembers Elizabeth. “It seemed somehow very symmetrical, very karmic.”

Oni is now happily living with Elizabeth and learning to trust again. Oni still disappears under furniture if someone new visits, but when she’s alone with Elizabeth, she plays happily with her toys or runs up and down the hallway or lies in the sun in the front room watching the traffic outside. There’s strong evidence that the love and attention cat people Dilara and Loretta invested in Oni gave this cat the head start she needed in starting over: On her very first night in her new home, Oni emerged from under the bed where she had taken refuge and snuggled up beside her new person. Elizabeth says it’s been that way ever since.

For someone who doesn’t have a trusted friend or relative to act as custodian for their pet, The SF/SPCA’s Sido Program provides safe passage for cats and dogs who outlive their guardians, minimizing emotional disruption in the animals’ lives and putting the pets on the fast track to adoption into new homes. For pets that come in together, The SF/SPCA makes every effort to adopt them out together.

Sido was a sweet, 11-year-old dog left behind when a San Francisco woman died in 1979. Fearing that no one would properly care for the dog after her death, the woman stipulated that Sido be put to sleep. But The SF/SPCA refused to carry out the will’s directive, fighting for the dog’s life in the courts and the state legislature. Sido was saved and lived another five years with a new family.

A free brochure explains how the Sido Program works and the requirements (for example, The SF/SPCA requests an annual donation of at least $25). For a copy of this brochure or more information, contact Katy Volz at The SF/SPCA, kvolz@sfspca.org or 415-554-3027.