

Advocacy & Rescue

CAT CHAMPIONS

Cool Cats on Campus

Cats living at University of Texas at San Antonio are earning degrees in TNR and colony management.

TAKE A WALK AROUND UNIVERSITY of Texas at San Antonio in the early morning before classes start, and you'll catch a glimpse of some campus residents you might not expect to see. You may spot small, furry ears hidden in the bushes or a fluffy feline face looking down at you from high atop a building. As soon as they hear breakfast arrive, the cats run toward their volunteers like they're racing to get to class on time.

Before students fill the sidewalks and lecture halls, the campus belongs to the cats, who have been TNRd (trapped-neutered-returned) and are cared for by the 15 members of Roadrunner Cat Coalition. The University-sanctioned group, which is comprised of faculty and staff, with help from students, has been caring for the campus cats since 2005. "They're part of university life," says Dr. Karen Williams, a senior lecturer in the Department of Information Systems and Cyber Security, and a co-founder of RCC. "The cats all have their jobs and earn their keep," she says with a laugh.

Devilishly handsome Lucifer would agree. The shiny black cat, who has an advanced degree in Rodent Catching, is keeping the mouse population down, much to the appreciation of the university maintenance crew. Cindy, with her beautiful calico coat and statuesque poses, would also concur — she lives outside the ceramics building, and is a muse and model for aspiring sculptors.

In all, there are 23 cats living on university grounds, down from 75 when the program first began.

The First Enrollees

"It all started when Karen and I were walking and saw a cat darting through the bushes. Her tail was bloody, and we knew we had to help her," says Kathy Pope,

Before classes start, Harry likes to get some love (and snacks) from Karen.



RCC TNRd Gray Mama and rescued her kittens after she was abandoned by a student.

who is the director of Graduate Student Services for the College of Business at the university and who co-founded RCC with Karen and several other staff members. "We started feeding her and then seeing other cats on campus. Then it got to be spring, and we saw all these kittens." They counted 40 adult cats and eight large litters of kittens. More were being born or abandoned almost every week.

Realizing that the feline population would swell without their intervention,

Kathy and Karen started RCC, enlisted other volunteers to help and embarked on a humane population control effort. One by one, they trapped, spayed/neutered, vaccinated and returned cats that were too shy to be adopted. Feeding stations and shelters were built, and care schedules were established. They also rescued, socialized and found homes for the kittens and adoptable strays. Over the years, they've re-homed about 100 of them — and pay for all of this out of their pockets.

"They're a very dedicated group," says Gary Norsworthy, DVM, owner of Alamo Feline Health Center, whose clinic treats the campus cats when they're sick or injured, like the cat with the bloodied tail. He's also adopted two cats from RCC. "The amount of time RCC spends caring for the

To learn more about Roadrunner Cat Coalition's efforts, visit: www.UTSAcats.com, or find them on Facebook.



cats is inspiring. Like with Karen: She has a job and still finds time to interact with these cats every day. This is really a mission in life for her, and they're doing such a good job."

College Cats 101

All across the country, many universities face similar challenges with feral and abandoned cats on campus, and an increasing number of them have adopted humane management approaches similar to UTSA and RCC. Stanford University once had 1,500 cats on their California campus. They established a TNR and colony management program, and, today, there are about 200 cats. Similarly successful campus programs can be found in every state, from University of Georgia to University of Washington.

"College campuses are a prime target for dumping cats," says Kathy, shaking her head. Sometimes it's a result of students leaving pets behind, but they're not the only source.

"In the early days of our program, we found that people from the community would come and dump boxes of kittens over by the dorms," says Karen with a sigh. "They probably thought that students would want to take care of them, but pets aren't allowed in the dorms." Thanks to close relationships with the campus police and the facilities departments, who alert RCC at the first sight of kittens and abandoned strays, RCC has been able to rescue and re-home the felines to keep the cat population in decline.

Help Through Education

RCC has focused on education and outreach to stop the abandonment problem and encourage the compassionate treatment of campus cats. In addition to their Facebook page, website and on-campus tabling during National Feral Cat Day, sometimes the act of caring for the cats itself is an educational opportunity.

"When we're out with the cats, people will come up and are interested in finding out about what we're doing, and they're



"We just take it a day at a time and, well, we just do it," Kathy says of caring for the cats.

pretty appreciative," Karen says. "They see with their own eyes that TNR works and that we're doing a good service for the cats and the university."

But at times, cats themselves are the best form of education about the program. Like talkative Shadow, whose favorite pastime is watching the volleyball team practice and offering his very vocal advice. Or Harry, a favorite among the football players — he likes to lounge in front of the dining hall and have people admire his sparkling orange and white fur.

"This is really a partnership between faculty, staff, students, facilities and police," Kathy says. "We just take it a day at a time and, well, we just do it. Anything we can do for the cats is an improvement for them. They didn't ask to live here. The least we can do is take care of them." 🐾

Have you seen cats on a college campus that you'd like to help? Check out Alley Cat Allies' Cats on Campus guide at www.alleycat.org/page.aspx?pid=314

Cimeron Morrissey is a cat rescuer, an award-winning writer and was named *Animal Planet's Cat Hero of the Year* in 2007. She provides advice and guidance to rescue groups and is a public speaker who teaches people how to help animals in need.



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