

# Business cats are ready to go to work

## HIGHLIGHTS

Business Cat Program seeks to place shelter cats at pet-friendly businesses temporarily until the felines find forever homes

Getting a business cat must be a collaborative decision of everyone working in the office or shop

Office pets can contribute to a good working environment





BY TERESA STEPZINSKI

*The Florida Times-Union*

GREEN COVE SPRINGS, FLA. — The two cats at the Clay County Animal Care and Control animal shelter are among the first in its newly minted Business Cat Program. Believed to be the first of its kind in Northeast Florida, the program initiated by Christina Sutherin, division director for Animal Care and Control, seeks to place shelter cats at pet-friendly businesses temporarily until the felines find forever homes.

Sutherin said they're trying to find a way to give the shelter cats greater exposure to the public and therefore increase their chances of being adopted. They also wanted to get the community involved, she said.

“Not everybody can have a cat at home because sometimes a child or spouse who has allergies or you have a dog that doesn't particularly want to share its home. But at work, it could be nice if you have the availability of an office space to be able to help an animal,” Sutherin said.

Office pets also can contribute to a good working environment.

“Animals in the office a lot of times have been shown to increase productivity and decrease stress,” she said. “The way we looked at it, it will benefit employers, too, because who doesn't want to increase productivity and decrease stress?”

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Christina Sutherin, division director for Clay County Animal Care and Control

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Each business cat receives complete veterinary care including being spayed or neutered and vaccinated before being placed at a business. The kitty will come with its own supplies such as food and litter. Businesses need to be able to provide a safe enclosed environment, not to mention lots of love and affection for the kitty.

Sutherin said many of the shelter's cats are social, and volunteers come in and spend time with them. But the felines would benefit from a break from shelter life by spending time in a different environment, she said.

“This is a way for us to learn more information about the cats. And also to give people a different venue to be able see them. If they're at a business frequented by a lot of people, sometimes it's a little less intimidating of an environment for an adopter than coming here to the shelter because it's hard not to let it melt your heart when you walk in and see them in their kennels,” said Sutherin, adding even though the cats are well-cared for at the shelter, it can be stressful for people to see them in that environment.

They began advertising the program in the third week of March.

Twenty-five shelter cats found homes during a recent weekend Super Adoption Event, which depleted temporarily the pool of potential business cats, she said.

Lilly and Jill were among those ready and available to go to jobs. About 1 year and 8 months old, Lilly is a black tiger-striped domestic short hair cat. Jill, about 7 months old, is a black and white domestic short hair cat.

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Getting a business cat, Sutherin said, must be a collaborative decision of everyone working in the office or shop. Sutherin said they check to ensure the site and environment is safe and suitable for a cat or kitten. There also will be support – help and advice – available to the business, she said.

“We don't want any of our cats let out into a busy parking lot. The provisions are there to keep them safe and secure,” she said. They also will provide a large crate so they can put the cat up at night to keep it from accidentally setting off the business's burglar alarm.”

Sutherin said she's seen similar programs overseas where cats are on staff at coffee shops, book stores and in office settings.

“If they tell us what their needs are, we can direct them to which cats we think will work out for them,” Sutherin said of the prospective program participants. They are looking for businesses with and without people coming and going a lot.

“Some of our cats would do better in kind of a low-traffic environment, and then we have some really social cats that are willing to meet someone new every two minutes and be an official greeter,” Sutherin said.

There is no fee to borrow a business cat, she said.

“It’s just their time and attention,” Sutherin said.



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