

Your 2011 Guide to a Healthy Cat

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By Joyce White, contributing editor

Home for Life

MISSION

The mission of Home for Life is to provide loving, lifetime care for cats and dogs that are unable to find homes due to old age, disabilities and medical or behavioral issues. To foster and inspire empathy and compassion through an array of innovative, cost effective and replicable model programs which combat the causes of animal neglect, abuse and abandonment.

Home for Life was founded in 1997 by Lisa LaVerdiere. It began operating at its present location in Star Prairie, Wis. in 1998.

"We were just some animal lovers, three lawyers, a photojournalist and an editor who had volunteered with other animal organizations including no kill rescues and shelters. Observing how many animals were not being served by the conventional animal welfare models, we thought a care-for-life sanctuary could provide a lifesaving alternative," says LaVerdiere.

"We call Home for Life the 'third door' because, if you think of a typical shelter, the animal will have two ways to leave – adoption or euthanasia. Our prototype of a care for life sanctuary provides a lifesaving third alternative for those animals for which euthanasia is premature or inhumane, but for whom an adoptive home cannot be found," she says.

Home for Life goes beyond being a shelter. It is one of a few facilities that gives those animals who would not otherwise find a forever home, a place where they will be loved and cared for – security for the rest of their lives.

"We have created a prototype sanctuary facility that serves as a model for the establishment of future Home for Life sanctuaries round the country. It is our belief that animals should live in a setting that is scaled to allow for individual attention and specialized care. We want quality of life and not just a warehouse existence," LaVerdiere says.

Home for Life was undeveloped farmland. To create the shelter that it is today, everything from electricity to heat, water and roads, had to be constructed or brought in. These included

a grooming salon, kitchen equipped with a sterilizing unit, laundry room, and lots of storage.

Current facilities include:

- Catteries with heated ceramic tile floors; large windows and skylights; uniform year-round temperatures controlled by heat and air conditioning.
- The Porsche and Mercedes Steffens Oasis for Feline Leukemia Cats building, that offers a comfortable and loving haven, with the same amenities as the catteries, for the population of feline leukemia cats and kittens who come to them from all over the country.
- Cat runs in all catteries and the feline leukemia building, providing spacious outdoor areas, enclosed for protection, for cats to use at will. They feature bird feeders and bird baths outside the enclosures for entertainment.

Community Outreach Programs

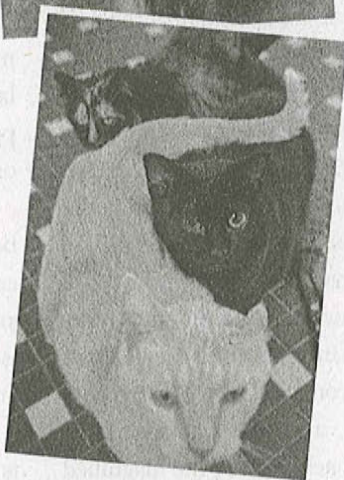
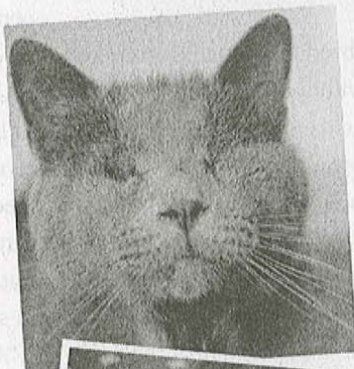
Home for Life animals participate in community outreach programs, completing the "circle of empathy." They become willing ambassadors of compassion, taking the empathy shown them and passing it on to other vulnerable members of society. Outreach programs include:

- The Pet Peace Corps programs, fostering a stronger bond of mutual respect between humans and animals by having them work toward a common mutually-beneficial goal.
- Peace Creatures®, a collaborative program with the Tubman Family Alliance of the Twin Cities and the Women of Nations Shelter in St. Paul, Minn., uses volunteers, staff and animals from Home for Life to teach peaceful conflict resolution to families impacted by domestic violence.

In addition, Home for Life offers one-of-a-kind programs to help animals, as well as partnering with national programs helping people and animals:

- Angel Care. Home for Life is the only sanctuary in the nation that offers a program that provides permanent care for pets that lose

their caretakers. It is designed to provide a safety net for personal pets while still assisting in the care of all Home for Life residents.



The Animal Sanctuary of St. Croix Valley

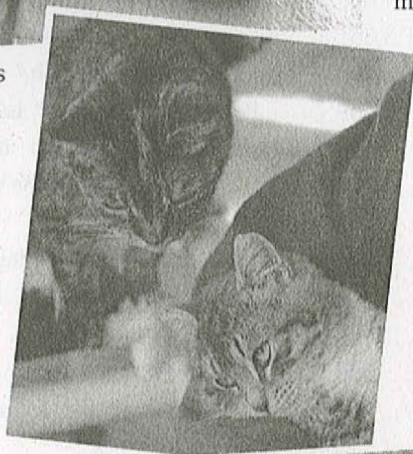
As part of this special donation program, if an enrolled member should become deceased, or be required by age or failing health to move to a long-term care facility while their pet remains alive, Home For Life will accept the animal and care for it as long as it lives.

If the enrolled member remains healthy and able to care for their pet throughout its life, then Home For Life will use the donation to support other less fortunate animals, and the enrolled member still benefits from the tax deductible donation.

"At Home for Life, our animals are not offered for adoption," LaVerdiere says, "Once an animal comes to us, it truly has a home for life. Through our example, we hope to discourage an acceptance of euthanasia. While many of the residents were, at one time abandoned, many others are surrendered by loving owners who recognize that their pet's special needs require full-time care."

One such owner is Anne Gale. Anne had this to say about her experience. "I was so impressed with Home for Life. From all I had read and heard, I expected your facility to be good. But it's a million times better than good. You and your staff made me feel at ease; the animals are all happy, clean, well cared for, and loved; and the grounds and buildings are lovely."

When asked why Home For Life doesn't allow adoptions, LaVerdiere said, "When we formed Home For Life, we were trying to fill a niche in animal welfare not currently being met. For example, in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area, which is our primary service area, there are more than 75-80 groups



focused on adoption."

She says, "Meanwhile, in the entire country, there are only a handful of organizations that cater to unadoptable animals. Every day, we answer approximately 100 phone calls and emails from all over the country inquiring about our services. Instead of competing with the other excellent adoption organizations, we decided to focus on an area that few have addressed," she says.

Home For Life depends on the support of sponsors, donors and foundations, and shortfalls are made up, out of pocket, by board members. Fund-raising is always a major concern as they do not receive government grants, and donations are tax deductible.

One way you can help is to sponsor a cat. To learn more, see the Sponsor an Animal page on the website www.homeforlife.org.

"We are staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including all holidays," LaVerdiere says, adding, "Our dedicated personnel consists of 20 full-time and part-time employees, plus independent contractors such as groomers, veterinarians and handymen."

All animal care specialists are thoroughly trained in how to take care of the pets' special needs and disabilities, whether their issues are physical or psychological. LaVerdiere says, "We are proud of our staff member's dedication and professionalism when working with these special creatures. The results of their work show when the animals pay us back with their own brand of love and devotion to the humans around them."

All donations go directly to the care and feeding of the animals. The administrative staff is comprised entirely of volunteers and the cost for designing, printing, and mailing the newsletter is underwritten by a single donor.

The website and monthly e-newsletter are also the work of volunteers.

For more information on **Home For Life:**

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