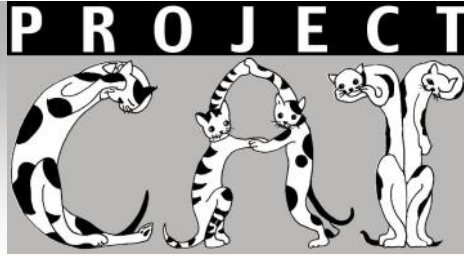


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Rescue and Adoptions
Behavioral Consulting

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info@projectcat.org

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Winter/Spring 2009

Beyond just a shelter...



Molly

"Gail Mihocko has been bringing cats to our clinic for over a decade. She does great work in a difficult time."
Arnold Rugg, DVM, Kingston Animal Hospital

~
"When other animal welfare agencies turn away cats in need, Project Cat, directed by Gail Mihocko, is there to help. Gail has proven her devotion to alleviating the suffering and improving the lives of thousands of cats over the years." Geri Ritchie, former board member UCSPCA

~
Gail Mihocko possesses an incredible amount of strength, understanding and compassion. What she has done and continues to do for the cat population is amazing - by finding good, safe homes for the homeless and by giving the downtrodden a second chance. Any time I find myself losing faith in humanity, I remind myself that there are still people out there who truly care -- people like Gail. Rebecca Diamond, Project Cat volunteer

~
"I have the greatest respect for the work of Project Cat. Gail Mihocko goes into the trenches where the suffering is greatest. She possesses a rare combination of compassion and level-headedness. Too bad there aren't more like her." Gloria Stevenson, Project Cat volunteer and animal advocate

Danielle Liotta

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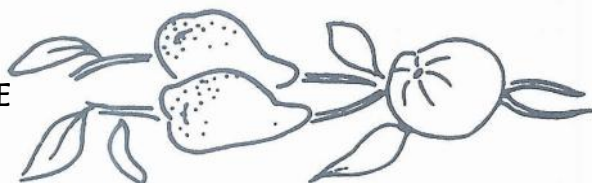


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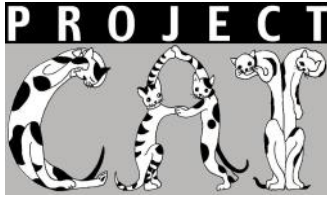


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Winter/Spring 2009



Greetings to Friends of Project Cat:

It has been way too long since our last newsletter was sent. Although we may have fallen behind in getting the word out to you, we certainly have not fallen behind in caring for the many cats that find their way to us, or us to them. 2008 has been a whirlwind year, a year of obstacles, anxieties, ups and downs, and always lots of hard work. We have lots of hope for 2009, as I know many people do.

The winter has been bitterly cold with lots of snow. People are experiencing financial hardships of a magnitude they never imagined. Heating bills are astronomical. When budgets get tight, pets are low on the priority list for many people. Our main mission is to help those in dire situations. No matter the reason that people give when surrendering a cat to us, our goal is to help, not to judge.

The calls never stop to provide help to homeless cats in need. The reasons just change with the seasons. Instead of summer calls about found litters of kittens, people are compelled to call because the weather is cold and cats are scratching at doors wanting to get in, or they start looking sickly because they cannot battle parasites along with the frigid, wintry weather; or they develop frostbite on their ear tips or abscesses from bite wounds; or they sustain injuries because they crawl up into car engines seeking warmth. We've had more than our share of casualties this year.

Some make it through the winter, but many do not. Many are left to freeze or starve either because we are not made aware of them or because we do not have the space or time or funds to accommodate their rescue. Project Cat operates seven days a week and we respond to as many calls as we are able. But our small size and limited finances determines how much we can take on.

No matter how much or how little each of us has, isn't it up to each of us to help those less fortunate who ask for help? For those that sit atop the heap now, in the blink of an eye could fall to the bottom. If we all continue to help each other and keep focused on the meaningful things in life, we will make it through to brighter days.

Please help us to continue our mission and get cats in out of the cold this winter by making a donation to our organization. Help us make it through to a brighter, warmer and renewed spring. Many thanks to all who support us in whatever way you can.

Gail Mihocko

Gail Mihocko
Director

*Just a few of our
fabulous adoption cats
in need of homes.*



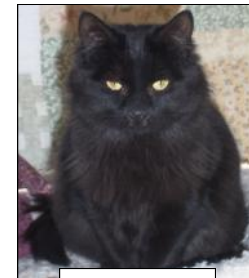
Penelope



Leo



Lars



Merriweather



Mathilda



Colette

Our Featured Adoption Cat



Marley relaxing on the bed with his mouse

We have many fabulous cats for adoption, but we decided to feature Marley, a special needs cat.

Marley was turned into our shelter after he was found as a stray with a badly broken rear leg. Despite the dangling leg, he was friendly and had a knack of warmly looking you right in the eye.

The prognosis from the vet was not good - the injury was from an old shotgun wound and the bone was shattered. The only option was to amputate the leg. He also had an even older injury of a broken jaw making his teeth poorly aligned. What had this poor cat gone through in his life?

After a grueling 24 hours deciding what to do, I was assured by friends and volunteers that they would raise the money to pay for the surgery, as this was not something that we could normally afford.

Despite being 9 years old, his bloodwork was normal and he was a seemingly healthy cat. So in March of 2008 Dr Rugg of Kingston Animal Hospital removed the leg at the hip. I picked him up the next day with 22 staples closing the incision!

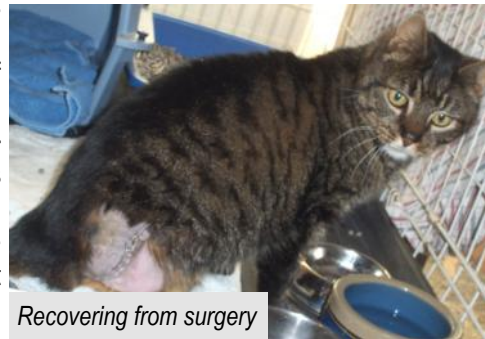
He settled readily into his cage and had a hearty appetite. After 2 weeks cage recovery he was moved into a foster home where he now resides with another cat and a poodle while he awaits adoption.

Although we call him a special needs cat, he gets along just fine on his 3 legs. He is a lap sitter, and he loves to play and can jump! This is truly an amazing cat who will be a great companion.

Update: As this went to print, Marley found a home!



Looking handsome



Recovering from surgery

Project Cat Receives Award at Empire State Animal Protection Forum

Project Cat's Director, Gail Mihocko received an award from New York State Humane Association "for her outstanding and selfless work, through Project Cat, in helping the unwanted, stray, and feral cats of Ulster county and beyond". She was among six others who were presented with awards at the forum on November 3rd, 2007.

This fifth annual conference was held in Poughkeepsie. It was an opportunity for New York animal shelter employees, law enforcement, veterinarians, and animal welfare organizations to attend workshops, displays, and network with others in the field.



Pat Valusek (right), Chairperson, NYSHA, presents Gail with award.

Lost and Found

The percentage of lost cats that are found by their owners is very low. But because a caring person's heart went out to a skinny stray cat, and another didn't give up the effort to find her cat, Project Cat was able to be the catalyst that reunited cat and owner, as the following story tells.

On 1 June 2007, Michelle Lheron of High Falls let her 3 year old cat, Ché, and his brother and buddy, Fur, outside for their usual morning romp. Ché never came home. Michelle was heartbroken and Ché's brother missed him. She got the word out about her lost cat, checked with neighbors, veterinarians, shelters, and posted signs with his picture. All to no avail.

Eleven months later, on 21 April 2008, we received a call from a woman at an apartment complex in New Paltz. She had been feeding a stray cat for a few days but was unable to keep him and could find no one to take him. We agreed to take him and were handed a bedraggled looking Maine coon mix cat. He was thin, malnourished, had a matted and thinning coat and was covered with ticks.

After two weeks of bathing, grooming, testing, vaccinating, deworming and lots of good food and long days of catnapping, "Theodore" went up for adoption. With his newfound vigor his "big cat attitude" emerged, but he had a winning personality to offset his testiness.

Four weeks later, on 24 May 2008, Michelle came to our annual Tag Sale Benefit at the High Falls Fire Station to check out our wares. She was chatting about her lost cat and how she still searches for him, stops her car if she sees a cat that looks like him, and browses shelter websites in case he ended up at a shelter. She asked me if we had a cat at our shelter that fit his description.

I said we did, but we acquired him just 4 weeks ago as a stray in New Paltz, quite a distance away and on the other side of the Walkill River. I showed her the pictures of our adoption cats that we always post at our sales, and pointed out "Theodore". After studying the picture for a while she came over to me and said "I think you might have my cat".

She asked about "Theodore's" personality, as her lost boy could have an attitude but also had a sweet side. I said he could be feisty, but also charming, and that he spoke in chirps and warbles. Michelle said her lost boy also spoke to her in chirps and warbles.

Excited, she hurried home and came back with a laptop loaded with pictures of Ché. We studied the pictures. "Theodore" had several irregular markings on his face, but so did Ché. We were both excited at this point (especially Michelle) and we arranged for her to visit at the end of the day after the sale. I was hopeful, but it seemed like such a long-shot. In fact, she reported her cat missing to us one year ago but I never called because I didn't think it could possibly be her cat. All the tag sale volunteers and shoppers were listening to the drama unfold and were anxious to hear the outcome.

Michelle took a last look at the photo of "Theodore" as she left and said to herself "I know that's him, I know that's my boy". Distracting herself while waiting for me to finish at the tag sale, she went to the Project Cat website and found additional pictures of "Theodore". There was no more doubt. She knew "Theodore" was her long lost Ché.

That evening, as soon as Michelle walked into the room and looked at "Theodore" she said "That's him, that's Ché". The tears started to flow as she kept looking at him not believing her eyes. It was an ecstatic feeling to see Michelle and Ché reunited. Ché didn't have a clue as to what was going on and didn't know why this woman was gushing over him. Although he didn't seem to recognize her face he did seem to respond to her scent.

On the way home Ché didn't meow as he did on past trips in the car but instead purred. Once home, Michelle reported that Ché immediately recognized his old digs, went to his favorite sleeping spot, and soon was playing with his brother and other cat housemates. Michelle woke the next morning to see Ché and Fur cleaning each other just as they used to.

Michelle reports that Ché is healthy and happy. He stills goes outside, but always keeps the house in eyesight and comes running to her when he is called. He seems to have a new found appreciation for a good dinner, a warm bed, play time and a very happy mom that spoils and loves him.



Reunited 28 May 2008



4 months later

Choosing A Cat

Deciding to bring a cat or kitten (or any kind of animal) into your home can be a wonderful event for both you and the cat. The decision should be given careful thought and preparation with all household members in agreement as to who will be the primary care giver. After all, the average lifespan of a domestic cat is 15 years, and one should enter this serious commitment with the understanding that the cat will be dependent upon your care for its lifetime.

No two cats are alike and they each have distinct personalities. Regardless what age you adopt it is important to select a cat that will match your lifestyle, activity level, and other animals that may already be in your household. A good shelter or rescue group will know the personalities of their cats and can help in choosing the right cat for you. In the unlikely event that you or your new cat are just not hitting it off, a responsible shelter should always allow you to return the cat. Not an easy thing to do, but better for everyone in the long-run.

Many people automatically think of adopting a kitten, but there are disadvantages of bringing one so young into the household. Most kittens have energy levels that are faster than a speeding bullet and allow them to leap tall buildings in a single bound. If they can't make the leap they may scale the curtains to get to that philodendron on top of the book shelf. Luckily they are cute enough to escape the wrath of most people. Kittens should always be adopted in pairs so they can wear each other out, keep up on their social skill development, and have a buddy when you can't be around. Our kittens go up for adoption at 12 weeks of age.

If a kitten sounds too chaotic for you, there are enormous advantages to adopting an adult cat. First, what you see is what you get. Although all cats can have personality changes over the years, just as humans can, they have already gone through the adolescent stage and have become pretty much who they are. A well-adjusted adult cat can easily adapt to a new home and become your new best friend. The idea that a kitten will grow up to be the way you want it is horsefeathers. Cats are born with certain genetic personality traits that may be influenced by their environment, but they are not a blank slate waiting to be molded by humans.

Second, if you really only want one cat, or live in a small space, there are plenty of adult cats that would prefer to live in a single cat household and would adore you forever.

Finally, the parents of all those kittens need homes also, and you will feel wonderful opening your heart to a cat that is often overlooked due to its age.



Wish List

Laundry Soap (unscented)
Dish Soap
Paper Towels
Cat Food (prefer Eagle Holistic Dry and
canned or other high quality)
World's Best Cat Litter or
Yesterday's News
Printer Ink
(black and color for HP OfficeJet K80)
Digital Baby Scale
High Resolution Digital Camera & Video
Prefabricated shed for storage

*Smaller items may be dropped off at
Lucas Avenue Pet Supply*

**Thank you to Lauren Marcus for
donating her laptop computer to us!**

Highlight on Volunteers

Marta Waterman: Professional cat petter, Marta discovered our organization 7 years ago when she adopted a cat from us and has been volunteering her time ever since. She visits weekly to clean litter boxes and to hang out with the cats. She adopted her last two cats from us, Fluffer and Enya, 5 year olds who had been up for adoption for way too long.



Alex Averin: A man who likes cats and admits it.

Every Thursday morning Alex spends a couple of hours visiting with, brushing and entertaining many of our cats. He makes sure not to miss anyone. He also recently began fostering adult cats for us. And as a bonus, he helps us out with our computer problems.

Nancy Purdum: Renaissance volunteer, Nancy has

been helping us in many ways since our beginnings 7 years ago. From cleaning and feeding, to shopping for food and litter, to assisting with all aspects of fund raising activities, to fostering cats and kittens, and availing herself to whatever requests we might make of her. She now has a busy household of all four rescue cats adopted from Project Cat.



Myra Damsky: Kitten foster home extraordinaire,

from April through November Myra and her husband Harold take in litters of kittens to be raised in a home environment. When old enough to be neutered, they may join groups of other cats up for adoption, unless they are adopted directly from their home. In six years they have fostered 82 kittens along with the adult mothers. And without fail about each litter they say "*this is the best litter of kittens we ever had*".



Brigitte Rahm: Foster home for genius kittens, at least this is how Brigitte describes all the kittens that grow up at her house. Hers are always the best and the smartest and the most beautiful. She provides them with a large nursery where they have educational toys and mazes and she rearranges their furniture *daily* to keep them stimulated and never bored. They all have little French accented "meows".



Nancy Piccoli: Longtime animal advocate,

Nancy has been involved with animal welfare for many years as a volunteer with New York State Humane Association and as a board member years ago with the local SPCA. For several years she housed mostly adult cats until we were able to adopt them out. She helps with emergency situations and makes herself available to respond to desperate calls regarding injured or sick cats.



Euthanasia – still a humane necessity

As much as we at Project Cat love telling you about all the dedicated and rewarding rescue work we do and all the cats that we successfully nurse back to health and find great homes for, we think it is also important that you, our supporters, adopters, and the people who turn to us for help, know about the other side of shelter and rescue work, the side that the public normally doesn't see and would probably rather not think about.

It would take many more pages than we have room for here to touch on all the complexities that underlie the issues shelters face regarding what to do with the homeless, stray and feral cats that contribute to the enormous overpopulation problem. But we would like to share with you some of our thoughts about an issue confronting every animal shelter and rescue group: that of euthanasia – the word literally means “good death” from the Greek *eu* = good and *thanatos* = death.

The trend toward “no-kill” shelters

The last two decades have seen a broad, national trend toward no-kill shelters. In one community after another, distaste for euthanasia has led shelters to embrace the no-kill philosophy, meaning that no healthy and adoptable animals will be put down, although the definition of adoptable varies with the shelter. In 1997, a majority of the members of the Ulster County SPCA, the main shelter in our area, voted to discontinue euthanasia and adopt a no-kill policy.

The decision by the UCSPCA and other shelters to “go no-kill” is at first glance understandable. Euthanasia takes a big emotional toll on shelter personnel. Animal lovers, after all, want to save lives, not take them. There's no denying that a well-run no-kill shelter can do a great deal of good for the animals in its care.

However, what proponents of the no-kill philosophy fail to acknowledge is that homeless pets that find their way to a good no-kill shelter are a fortunate minority of the thousands in need of help.

The UCSPCA's shift to no-kill has had a very negative impact on homeless and unwanted animals, especially cats. The animal control ordinances of Ulster County's municipalities and towns encompass only dogs. So even though stray cats are much more numerous than stray dogs, animal control officers are under no obligation to respond to calls about cats.

For this reason, in communities across the country with a serious stray cat overpopulation, such as ours, it is crucial that no-kill shelters be complemented by conventional, or open-door, shelters that will accept all animals. That is the case in New York City and in many other parts of the nation but not in Ulster County. When no open-door facility exists, serious problems can result.

First, no-kill shelters fill up quickly, and can easily become overcrowded. In some no-kill shelters, animals that don't get adopted can languish in cages and pens, or in substandard conditions, for years because it is considered preferable to keep them alive, no matter how poor their quality of life, rather than euthanize them. Some animals become “cage-crazed”, depressed or withdrawn and develop health problems, both physical and psychological.

A second problem that occurs when a community's only shelter is no-kill is that many animals have to be turned away due to lack of space. Prior to 1997, when the UCSPCA had an



open-door policy, someone who had to give up a pet, or who found an animal they were unable to keep, or who became aware of a pregnant feral cat living under their front porch, could bring the animal to the shelter. Today, that person often has nowhere to turn.

What happens to the animals that are turned away by no-kill shelters?

Many are abandoned. A few have the good luck to be rescued and adopted, but most engage in a harsh struggle for survival, subject to starvation, hypothermia, injury from vehicles or acts of cruelty, parasites, infection from abscessed wounds, and painful, untreated diseases.

Some animals rejected by no-kill shelters fall into the hands of “hoarders,” who accumulate a large number of animals but lack the means to care for them. These animals live crammed together in a filthy, reeking house or barn. They are seldom spayed or neutered, so they reproduce, and they quickly increase in numbers to the point of becoming unmanageable. Occasionally, animals are seized from a hoarder after a neighbor files a complaint, but many hoarding situations never come to light.

Our experiences

Every day we receive calls, often desperate ones, from people seeking our help with cats. Many tell us that before contacting Project Cat, they called other shelters and no-kill groups, but these organizations could not take in any more animals. Some of these cats belong to people who can no longer care for them or no longer want them. Some are strays, once someone's pet but either lost or abandoned. Some are feral cats that have had little or no human contact and thus are wild, untamable and either fearful of, or aggressive toward, humans.

It's not only healthy cats that these shelters turn away, but sick and injured animals, those in greatest need of immediate care.

Over one recent weekend, we took in four adult cats, three with badly broken legs, from three different locations. One of the cats was emaciated and anemic, and another had a necrotic abdominal area (the entire abdomen was rotting away from infection). The fourth cat was an adolescent blind in one eye, from either injury or disease. The cats with broken legs had to be euthanized because we had neither the space nor the financial resources to provide the extensive veterinary care and rehabilitation they would have needed. We put the adolescent up for adoption because, apart from the blindness in one eye, she was healthy. Two of the people who surrendered these cats to Project Cat had in vain asked other shelters for help before calling us.



One of the lucky ones: This intact male cat was being fed outdoors for 2 years until he was trapped and brought to our shelter mid-winter with a serious and infected neck wound. Fortunately, he allowed us to handle him and after 4 weeks of twice daily wound cleaning and antibiotics, he was neutered and now lives an indoor life as a big, mushy, ex-tom cat.



Requests for our help also come from people in neighborhoods overrun by free-roaming, unsterilized cats that some well-meaning person is feeding. Although the neighbors may not want to see these cats suffer, they also don't want them multiplying exponentially, defecating in their gardens, spraying male cat urine around their homes, fighting outside their windows at night, or killing birds. These are difficult cases to deal with because there is no outcome that makes all parties happy. Neutering all the cats requires time and money, which are always in

short supply. Even when this is feasible, there is no guarantee that someone will commit to properly caring for the cats for the duration of their lifetime. While this practice of TNR (trap-neuter-release) keeps the cats from reproducing, assuming they can all be trapped, they still have to struggle to survive in a neighborhood where many people may resent their presence.

Euthanizing is the last thing we at Project Cat want to do, but turning our backs on an animal we know will remain outdoors during the frigid winter, with no shelter or food, or at risk of injury or abuse, and vulnerable to illness, is for us not an option. We cannot tell ourselves, as some advocates of the no-kill philosophy apparently do, that these animals will somehow manage to fend for themselves, or that someone else will come along to help, and that even if they are suffering, they are at least alive. We've seen too much misery to believe such things.

Sometimes we do have to turn away an animal, but it's never because we are unwilling to do the "dirty work" of euthanasia but because we lack the resources to come to the aid of every animal. We wish we could help them all.

Our Choice

The pet surplus problem is an undeniable reality. There are far more cats than there are responsible homes available to them. Millions are euthanized each year in this country. Add to this the fact that many people see cats as disposable, or irresponsibly let them reproduce, and we are faced with large numbers of stray and homeless animals.

A time may come – let us hope it's not far off – when the number of unwanted and homeless pets will decrease to the point where euthanasia becomes exceedingly rare.

This will happen, however, only when we have stronger animal welfare laws in place, when people who adopt or buy pets commit to caring for them throughout their lives, not just until they become an inconvenience, and when all of us come to see animals as sentient creatures deserving of a quality life for their own sake. Until then, shelters must choose: They can turn away needy animals to avoid having to euthanize, or they can try to help the greatest number of animals possible by making rational yet heartfelt decisions based on reality. At Project Cat we have made our choice.



This tiny kitten's back was broken after being slammed in a door. The owner could not afford to take it to a vet. They reluctantly gave it to us. We took the entire litter and spayed the mother, which they kept.

Some of the cats whose lives we could not save, but refused to turn our backs on:



Very sick and practically frozen, this stray, intact male was so congested he could hardly breathe. He was huddled in a pile of leaves.



This senior female was found wandering in circles in a kind person's yard - she was completely blind.



Bloody tumors on the paws of this outdoor feral cat's feet made walking difficult and painful.



A sweet but malnourished stray cat had half his face rotting away from infection, possibly hit by a car, in addition to a skin problem.



Prevent Unwanted Cats by Spaying & Neutering

Kittens are certainly cute, but only when they are healthy and wanted. Kittens that are born outdoors are often too wild to make desirable pets. Kittens born beneath a dumpster amidst garbage and filth or in the home of an animal hoarder can be a problem because they are often in poor health, infested with parasites and may be carrying diseases.

Because of the sheer numbers of them out there, it becomes impossible to find homes for them all and only the healthiest and friendliest will be chosen by most adopters.

Although cats can breed all year long the majority of breeding takes place February through April with births beginning in April through May. A female will produce a second litter mid summer and even a third if conditions are favorable. **If you have been putting off getting your cat sterilized, do it now.** If you are aware of a stray cat or neighbor's cat that is not yet neutered please encourage them to take action now.

Do not start feeding a stray cat because you feel sorry for it without immediately making a neutering appointment for it or turning it in to a shelter. Gestation for a pregnant female is only 62 days so things can happen very quickly.

The only way that euthanasia of healthy, adoptable animals will cease is through responsible pet guardianship and that includes preventing excess litters through spaying and neutering.

Low-Cost Spay & Neuter Clinic

We have been patiently waiting for Ulster County's first low-cost, mobile spay/neuter clinic to start operating, and it has finally happened. The mobile unit will be run by Rondout Valley Animals for Adoption on Route 209 in Accord.

Many people have worked hard to turn this dream into a reality and have donated medical supplies and money to get it up and running. Several veterinarians are providing their services.

The mobile clinic will provide a much needed service to the people and animals of our community. Fees will be kept to a minimum because the clinic's purpose is to sterilize pets, not to make a profit. Grants will eventually help to offset costs.

The clinic is not yet operating full time, but they are working their way up to it. For an appointment call 687-7619.



*Indigo says,
"See, I'm neutered,
it's cool"*

Donation of Vehicles

In our last newsletter we requested the donation of a vehicle in which to transport cats and all the other stuff we have to cart around. Our wish was granted and we received a donation of a Ford Explorer and of a Subaru Outback!

Vivian Burke donated her 1999 Ford Explorer to Project Cat. Wow, what a surprise! I went to visit her and Pepper, whom she adopted from us, to pick up our "new" truck. It was in great condition and it runs like charm.

At the same time, Linda Bloom, a long-time supporter of Project Cat, knew our then current Subaru was on its last legs and donated money to purchase a new used one! It is important for us to have a snow worthy car because we always need to get to the shelter and we sometimes have to travel through messy conditions to respond to cats in distress.

We thank both of you very much for your very generous donations!