

## VOLUNTEERING

# King Street Cats: Where cats are kings

BY KRIS CORONADO

*This is the first in an occasional series of Weekend columns about area volunteering opportunities.*

In a nondescript storefront in Alexandria, Lorraine Refuto stands on a tiled floor and gingerly strokes a black and white cat on the counter before her. "Baby Girl was turned in to us because her owner is now in a nursing home," she says. "She's the only one I forgive. The others, not so much."

Created in 2003 — and formerly called the Albert Foundation — King Street Cats is a feline-focused animal rescue that houses about 30 free-roaming cats at its one-story location. They perch on tiered cat climbers, snuggle inside blanketed boxes and rub against Refuto's legs as she reaches into a cabinet to pull out a beige pet carrier.

It's 9 a.m. and she'll be driving an 8-year-old calico, Jay Jay, to an appointment at the Fort Hunt Animal Hospital. Refuto ducks

behind a door into a smaller room to retrieve today's patient. Jay Jay suffers from feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV), so she's kept in King Street's isolation area to prevent spreading the virus to other cats.

"She was given up because the lady said she wasn't huggable enough," says Refuto, carrying the case with the docile Jay Jay in it. "I wonder if she knew the cat had FIV and then turned her in."

The 64-year-old retiree has been working with King Street since February 2010 and is one of 70 volunteers. The nonprofit group, run entirely by good Samaritans, raises its average annual operating cost of \$90,000 through fundraising and donations. The volunteers serve a variety of roles: feeding the cats, cleaning the animals' living space and helping out at adoption drives. Folks can pitch in as much or as little as they want, Refuto says. She typically contributes nine hours a week, mopping floors or driving cats to vet appointments.



KRIS CORONADO FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**King Street Cats is an animal shelter that houses cats from kittens to 11 years old. Volunteers feed the cats or drive them to the vet.**

That's what she is doing this Wednesday morning, rolling along the leafy George Washington Memorial Parkway. Refuto is one of four volunteers who make the trip once or twice a week. There are scheduled appointments to get new arrivals spayed and neutered, as well as unanticipated trips when a cat gets sick.

Inside the veterinarian's office, it's clear that Refuto has a friendly rapport with the women

behind the check-in counter. In a couple of minutes, Jay Jay is taken into an examination room. Refuto scoops her out of the carrier and soothingly rubs her sides as the cat's temperature is taken. "Jay Jay, you're a pretty girl," she coos. She helps hold the cat in place when veterinarian Jennifer Bowles examines the cat's teeth and listens to her breathing. Bowles recommends a course of antibiotics for Jay Jay.

"They are by and large the best rescue we've worked with," Bowles said at the check-up's conclusion. "Anything their cats need, they're going to do it. They do a good job."

And with that, Refuto returns the cat to the carrier, signs her out and is through the door by 9:45 a.m. One needn't have any veterinary experience to be a cat taxi driver, Refuto says. "Be willing to learn and have a love of

animals." After an hour-long orientation, a newbie would accompany a seasoned volunteer to a vet appointment to learn the ropes before doing it alone.

Refuto returns just after 10 a.m. and puts Jay Jay in isolation. She won't remain there long. After a follow-up appointment to Fort Hunt, Jay Jay is soon adopted by a local family. It's one happy ending, with dozens more to go.

**Where is it:** King Street Cats, 25 Dove St., Alexandria. 703-231-7199. [www.kingstreetcats.org](http://www.kingstreetcats.org).

**Get involved:** Volunteer orientation is the second Saturday of the month from 11 a.m. to noon at King Street Cats. Prospective volunteers may e-mail [contact@kingstreetcats.org](mailto:contact@kingstreetcats.org).

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