

COMMUNITY



Helping multi-cat households get along

By DR. DANA KOCH
CORRESPONDENT

Dear Dr. Dana,
I recently adopted a new cat and she is fighting with my other cats. How do I keep order in my multi-cat household?

Dear Reader,
Many pet parents often ask themselves "why can't they all just get along?" when it comes to having more than one cat. Owners of multiple cats often face many challenges when trying to balance distinct and varying personalities of their feline residents. There are several elements to consider and preparations to be made when adding new animals to your household.

1. Space and resource requirements: It would be wise to have designated areas or safe zones for your cats to enjoy personal time. This may be a separate room, multiple cat trees, a covered bed, a cardboard box, or a carrier with the door left open. Carefully monitor for any territorial tendencies over these hiding or napping spots. Toys, scratching posts (both horizontal and vertical), catnip and interactive games should be in ample supply. On average, active cats that exert more energy when engaged in play will exhibit less aggressive behaviors toward other animals within the household.

2. Litter box usage: Many veterinary behaviorists recommend that a household should have the same number of litter boxes as cats in the household plus one extra. Cats may prefer to mark one litter box as their own or chose to use one litter box for urinating and one for defecating. Litter box cleanliness is essential for preventing unnecessary fighting among felines as well lessening the chance of inappropriate urination outside the litter boxes.

3. Meal time: Creating a specific feeding schedule is ideal for multi-cat households. Not only does this allow you to carefully observe how your cats handle meal times (such as sharing, territorial feeding behaviors, etc.) it also is helpful in maintaining a healthier weight over those cats that have free choice feeding. Pet owners want to ensure that one cat is not consuming the majority of the food while the other cat is pushed out of the way. Having more than one bowl is recommended to help evenly disperse the volume a food consumed on a daily basis. In terms of water bowls or fountains usually one or two is sufficient. Fights over drinking water is not frequently reported by cat owners.

4. New cat on the block: In the event you are preparing to bring a new cat it would be recommended that you prepare a separate space for your new feline to spend the first couple of days.

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A PIECE OF HISTORY

50 years ago today: The first confirmed octuplets were born this week in Mexico City.



NANCY ROKOS / PHOTOJOURNALIST

Nhu Vyong, of Philadelphia, hugs Raven, a domestic longhair calico that she is fostering, as the cat recovers from a broken pelvis.

Avoiding a cat-astrophe

Evesham woman, animal hospital, work together to save injured feline.

By MELISSA MASON
CORRESPONDENT

As the legend goes, cats always land on their feet. In reality, though, they sometimes need a little help from their two-legged friends to get back on their paws. Raven, a young, long-haired tabby from South Philadelphia, needed help from several of her human friends — on both sides of the Delaware River.

Raven's story begins rather unremarkably. One day, she simply showed up at a feral cat feeding station in South Philadelphia. The feeding station is part of a "managed colony," meaning the cats have been spayed or neutered, vaccinated, tested for illness and returned to the area in which they were found. Each colony has a caretaker, who feeds the cats, keeps the area neat and clean and monitors the members for illness or injury.

While she was initially scared and skittish, the colony caretaker could tell that she was not used to life on the streets. Over the next week, her caretaker worked to gain Raven's trust, and began searching for a foster home. Her time on the streets



The lateral X-ray of the cat's pelvis after surgery shows the repairs that were made.

was intended to be brief. But her caretaker would soon discover that it would be even shorter than she expected.

On a warm Sunday evening in December, Raven's caretaker began her nightly routine of feeding the cats when a sudden noise caught her attention.

A car was careening around the corner, the screech of its tires offering only a brief warning to Raven, who was attempting to cross the street. The next sound was one her caretaker will never forget. Without attempting to slow down, the car hit Raven at full speed.

With the sound of the sickening thud reverberating in her head, Raven's caretaker ran to her side, fearing the worst. At first glance, it would seem that her worst fears were realized. Raven was lying lifelessly in the street, her small body twisted in ways that a cat's body wasn't meant to bend. But then, Raven opened her eyes.

Raven's caretaker immediately sprang into action. Raven was fighting to live, and she was going to fight for Raven.

After removing Raven from the street, her caretaker began to make phone calls. Her first call was to her daughter, Nhu Vyong.

Vyong, who also lives in South Philadelphia, has long been involved with cat rescue.

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Raven

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She knew that Raven would need immediate veterinary care, and she knew it was going to be expensive. "It was a Sunday, so the regular vets weren't open," said Vuong. "The emergency vets in the area are very expensive, and ask for payment upfront. I was panicking, as was my mother."

As her mother had done, Vuong picked up her phone to start making calls. Before she could do so, fate, by the way of a phone call from South Jersey, intervened.

Karen O'Rourke, president of the South Philadelphia nonprofit cat rescue Stray Cat Relief Fund, finally had a minute to catch up on phone calls. Her first was to Vuong, who is a volunteer and foster for Stray Cat Relief Fund. In fact, Vuong is the reason why O'Rourke, who lives in Evesham, became involved with rescuing cats in South Philly.

"The Stray Cat Relief Fund had been in operation for several years, but things never really got off the ground," said O'Rourke. "The area was strongly in need of (outdoor cat) shelters, feeders, food and community outreach. I got involved due after seeing the devastation and starvation facing cats in the area." O'Rourke's hard work paid off, and she was named president of the Stray Cat Relief Fund three years ago.

After hearing about Raven's injury, O'Rourke had a phone call of her own to make. And she knew immediately who to dial. "I had been going to Mount Laurel Animal Hospital for a while," said O'Rourke. "I had recently began using their services more and more, as they are extremely rescue-friendly."

While animal hospital, a Burlington County institution dating back more than 40 years, had always been supportive of local animal rescues, its efforts expanded significantly when the business was sold a few years ago. The new owners, Dr. Christopher Torre and Dr. Robert Mankowski, are so committed to animal rescue that they developed a new position for a rescue coordinator.

Jillian Erwin was used to the fast pace of the hospital's emergency room, which offers 24-hour veterinary services. When she was asked to take on the role of rescue coordinator, she wondered if she might miss the high energy environment she was used to. As it turns out, her fears were unfounded.

"This has been an eye-opening life changing experience," said Erwin. She quickly learned that animal rescue, like the emergency room, was a 24-hour business. "We thrive on being available at all times." Animal rescuers will often joke that emergencies only happen on the weekend, at night, or on a holiday. Raven's emergency covered two out of the three. "I received a call from Karen, who was in a panic," said Erwin. "I hadn't crossed paths with her before, but when I heard what happened I knew we needed to act."

Erwin's next words to O'Rourke were ones she will never forget.



Dr. Caroline Garzotto, an orthopedic surgeon at Mount Laurel Animal Hospital, demonstrates stretching exercises on Raven, a cat recuperating from a broken pelvis.

NANCY ROKOS / PHOTOJOURNALIST



Raven gets hugs from Nhu Vyong (left), of Philadelphia, who is fostering her, and Karen O'Rourke, of Evesham, of Stray Cat Relief Fund, who brought the cat to Mount Laurel Animal Hospital for treatment after she was hit by a car.

NANCY ROKOS / PHOTOJOURNALIST

"Don't worry about money, just get her in," Erwin said.

With that being said, Erwin had to make a phone call herself. "I told Dr. Torre the situation, and he offered a 25 percent discount on Raven's care."

"We have what we call 'tiers of rescue,' we work with 70 rescues we work with," said Erwin. "The rescues that use Mount Laurel for their primary vet care are considered 'VIP's' and receive the greatest discounts."

Though Stray Cat Relief Fund hadn't reached VIP level, an exception was made in order to save Raven's life.

Raven was rushed to Mount Laurel, where she was diagnosed with a broken pelvis. Her injury required emergency surgery, which,

after applying the discount, totaled \$4,000.

The Stray Cat Relief Fund, like many rescues, has an emergency fund to help cover unexpected expenses. Just as rescuers are fond of saying that emergencies only happen on nights and weekends, they also find that they tend to occur in succession.

"We just had two cats that we needed major surgery, so our reserves were gone," said O'Rourke. "MLAH was so accommodating, and worked with us to set up a monthly payment plan."

After being discharged, Raven became an official Stray Cat Relief Fund rescue cat. As Raven did not have a microchip, an electronic implant that contains pet ownership information, and no matching lost reports had

been filed, Raven went home with Vuong, who nursed her back to health. "She was a good patient," said Vuong. "It was tough because she couldn't use her legs at all." As she was completely immobile, Raven needed to

be spoon-fed, and needed assistance in using the litter box. After two weeks, she began to sit up on her own. "Her recovery was tough," said Vuong. "She was crated for four weeks while her

wounds healed." After regaining some mobility, Raven graduated from the crate to a bedroom.

Raven's follow-up visits to the animal hospital showed continuous improvement. Her final X-ray revealed that she was fully healed, other than the bones being a little crooked. "You really can't tell that anything happened to her," said Vuong. "Except when she runs. Then you can tell she's a little crooked." Not bad for a cat whose pelvis was described by medical staff as "broken in half."

Now that she is back on her feet, Raven is ready to find her new home. Vuong, her foster mom, has only great things to say about Raven. "She gets along with other cats, which is huge," said Vuong. "She is the type that will really bond with her new person. She's definitely a people-oriented cat and she loves to sleep in bed with her human."

While Raven has been getting by with the help of her new friends, the challenge is only just beginning for her heroes. A fundraiser set up specifically for Raven's bill on the web site Youcaring.com has only raised \$250 to date. In addition to Raven, the rescue has over 40 cats in its care, as well as the outdoor colonies that it helps manage.

As a nonprofit organization, the Stray Cat Relief Fund is funded entirely on donations.

"Right now, we're focused on getting that bill paid," said O'Rourke. "It's hard when you have to say 'no' to taking in new cats due to a lack of funds."

Of course, everyone involved in Raven's rescue feels that she was more than worth the effort. "It certainly wasn't her fault that she was in that situation," said O'Rourke.

To learn more about Stray Cat Relief Fund, or to make a tax-deductible donation, visit straycatreliefund.org. Raven's fundraiser site can be found at youcaring.com/raven-703133.

Teen Excellence



2017 NOMINATION FORM

Are you an adult who knows a teenager deserving of special recognition? We invite you to become a nominator for the Burlington County Times Teen Excellence Awards, presented in partnership with the YMCA of Burlington and Camden Counties. Burlington County's most outstanding teens will be chosen based upon community service and academic efforts. Our program seeks to recognize students who may not be at the top of their class but have overcome an obstacle, worked hard and found success. Winners will be recognized at an awards ceremony, in the pages of the BCT and on our web site in June. This program is open to all county high school students, grades 11 through 12. Please type or print legibly. This form may be copied.

Name of nominee _____ Phone Number _____
Email address _____
Street address _____ City _____
School _____ Grade _____

THIS SECTION TO BE COMPLETED BY NEEC:

List your top two extra-curricular school activities:
1. _____
2. _____

List community activities, organizations in which you have been involved (i.e. Scouts, church) especially as a volunteer: _____

List the most challenging courses you have taken: _____

List honors or awards you have earned: _____

Cumulative Grade Point Average _____ Signature of Student _____

Name of nominator _____ Phone # of nominator _____
Signature of nominator _____ Email of nominator _____

In addition to this form, you must include:
• A LETTER OF NOMINATION from a teacher, employer, school administrator, or church leader who can attest to the leadership of the nominee. Letter must be written by the actual nominator. Keep it brief – no longer than one page. One nomination per student, please.
• AN ESSAY BY THE NOMINEE describing the one thing of which you are most proud, i.e., community leadership, volunteer efforts, academic excellence, success in the face of hardship, or other accomplishment. Your essay should be confined to the front of one page.
If you have questions, please contact Jen Yeager at 215-345-3064.

All nominations must be received by March 31, 2017
Mail to: Teen Excellence,
Burlington County Times, 4284 Route 130, Willingboro, NJ 08046
Burlington County Times
the YMCA OF BURLINGTON AND CAMDEN COUNTIES

Pets

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This also allows that other cats in the household to become more accustomed to the new scent circulating through their space. After a few days, allow for chaperoned interaction. It is important at this stage for you to not leave the cats completely on their own and to watch closely for signs of potential trouble, including flattened ears, flickering tail, raised paw or vocalization. Eventually you can begin to trust your cats to be alone

together and develop their own (hopefully) compatible relationship.

5. Ongoing issues: Obviously there are going to be cases where particular cat personalities do not mix even with separate spaces and proper litter box maintenance. This can be a very frustrating problem for pet owners. It would be ideal to discuss this issue with your veterinarian or veterinary behaviorist. If there is no underlying medical issues, they may suggest some natural calming therapies such as feline pheromone diffusers that emit a cat

specific pheromone to help reduce stress and to induce a calming effect among cats. In extreme cases your veterinarian may discuss medications that help cats with emotional or hormonal imbalances that result in aggression issues.

Dr. Dana Koch, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine, works for HousePaws Mobile Veterinary Service. Her professional interests include identifying pocket pets, preventative medicine and internal medicine. She services Bucks County, Philadelphia and South Jersey.

Send questions to Pet Project, Burlington County Times, 4284 Route 130, Willingboro, NJ 08046; email aspetproject@burlingtoncountytimes.com; or www.facebook.com/HousePawsMobileVet