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Kitties at Oakland Animal Services enjoy their colorful hammocks—and look adorable while chillaxing.

Hanging Out

Providing hammocks for shelter cats

BY NANCY PETERSON

Megan Webb, director of Oakland Animal Services in California, liked seeing cats resting on towels in their cages, but she didn't like how often the towels slid off the cage shelves and got dragged into litter boxes and food and water bowls, forcing staff to toss them in the wash more than they wanted to. Keeping the cats' scents on their towels is comforting to them, but displaying litter-crusted towels was unappealing. There had to be a better way. In 2006, Webb thought of hammocks—and in spite of some naysayers who argued the cats wouldn't use them, she thought it was worth a try.

Mary Cochran, a volunteer at the shelter, liked the idea, and she and her handyman husband, Russ, started making hammocks soon afterward. "Once I saw the first one hung and a cat lounging in it, I couldn't get them made fast enough," says Cochran.

After making about 30 hammocks, the Cochrans passed the torch in 2010 to volunteer Lesley Allen, who altered the design: Instead of the grommets the Cochrans had been using—which didn't hold up to heavy-duty washing machines—Allen decided to use loops made of strong webbing ribbon to attach the hammock to eyehooks drilled into the cage wall and shelf. The loops don't easily fray, even if the kitties scratch them.

Allen uses a variety of colorful flannel fabrics for the hammocks. "The fabric's the fun part," she says. Each hammock takes about an hour to make and requires only basic sewing skills and a sewing machine. "There's a lot of wear and tear with all the washing, and I don't know that hand sewing would stand up to it."

Allen buys the fabric, makes the hammocks, and donates them to the shelter

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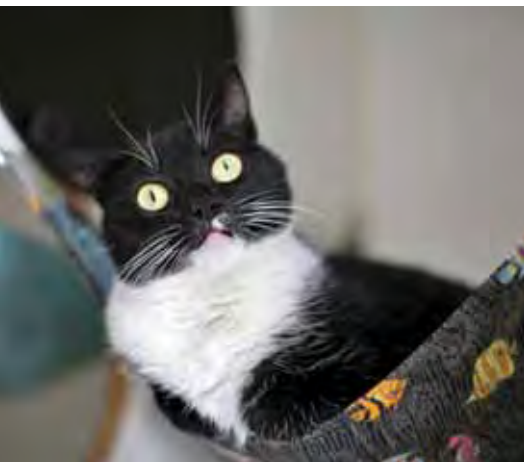
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as a labor of love. She estimates the cost is about \$5-\$6 per hammock (depending on the fabric). “I’m just watching how they come out of the wash to see which ones fare the best,” she says. “Some fabrics pill a lot. I’ve obviously made a note not to use those in future.” She warns that bleach adds wear and tear, and is another reason she likes using bright fabric colors. “If you start off bright, the fading won’t show quite as much,” she says.

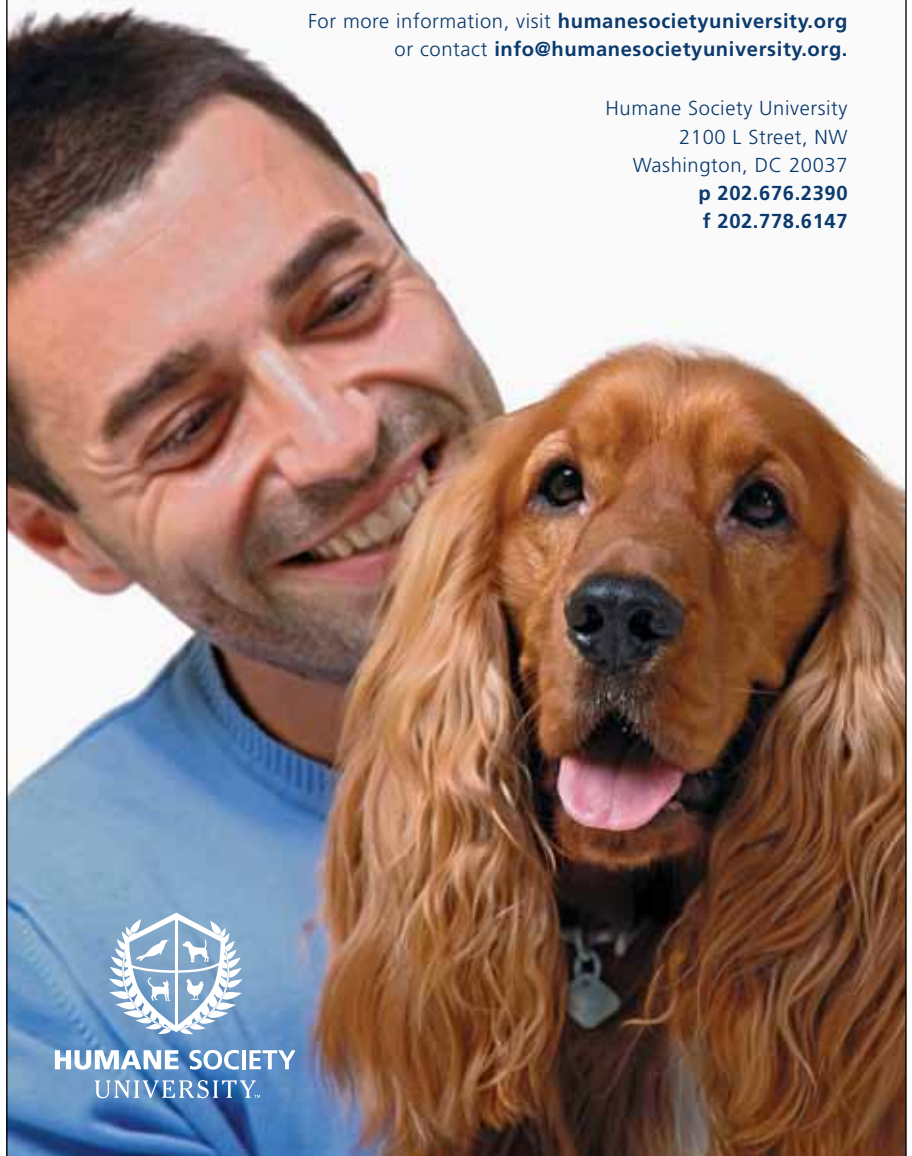
Allen makes hammocks several times a year, checking in with the shelter about its supply—if it’s getting low, it’s time to sew. Staff and volunteers love the hammocks because they brighten up the cages and are easy to install and remove. The shelter places hammocks in the second tier of all the cat condos, and most cats—except very large ones who may not fit!—enjoy it. The kittens pile up on one another and look quite adorable.

“So the cat is up high in a nice little soft hammock, and you know how they like to be high,” says Allen. “They can look out on the world and survey everything from a height.” ■

For guidance on how to make one of Oakland’s cat hammocks, check out Allen’s instruction sheet at animalsheltering.org/cat_hammocks.



The hammocks at Oakland Animal Services are leaving cats wide-eyed with wonder.



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