

Changing Lives for Cats, One at a Time: Forever Home Feline Ranch in Rochester

by Tara Simmons

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Cats are one of the most popular pets in the world. In fact, there are over 500 million domestic cats worldwide. Evidence suggests that people domesticated cats in the Middle East more than 10,000 years ago, and cats were revered in many of the region's traditions.

The average lifespan for a pet cat is around 13-14 years, however, a well cared for cat may live to 15 years or beyond, some make it to 18-20 years, and a few extraordinary felines have passed 25-30 years of age.

Unfortunately, not all cats have homes where they are loved. It is estimated that there are between 60 and 100 million stray and feral cats in the United States. The average lifespan of a stray or homeless cat is much shorter than a family pet — lifespans vary from 4–8 years. Lack of food and water, climatic conditions and dangers such as cars, predators, etc., greatly affect their longevity. Stray cats are also prone to infectious diseases and a lack of medical care will likely lead to death. Most animal shelters are filled to capacity with homeless cats and kittens at any given time, and the fate for many of these felines is often euthanasia.

Forever Home Feline Ranch in Rochester is trying to put a small dent in this problem, providing adoption possibilities for eligible felines, and a sanctuary where those deemed not adoptable have a second chance to live a full life in a no-cage, no-kill environment. Currently the ranch has 72 cats on the property, with 87 more cats and kittens in foster homes waiting for adoption.



There are some free roaming cats at the ranch, but most live in group settings in climate controlled rooms where they can look out the windows, climb on high perches and play together. Groupings include senior cats, new intakes and there is even a “house” that provides FIV positive cats a community to live comfortably together where they will not be an infectious threat to the other felines on the ranch. (FIV — feline immunodeficiency virus — is one of the most common and consequential infectious diseases of cats around the world which attacks the immune system, leaving the cat vulnerable to many other infections.)

As noble as the cause of Forever Home Feline Ranch is, they cannot take in strays or personal surrender cats, due to the possibility of medical issues that could spread throughout the ranch population before being detected. The cats at the ranch have mostly been pulled from kill shelters. Forever Home Feline Ranch also works very closely with the Animal Protection League (APL) in Springfield.

FHFR Board of Director Vice-President Megan Fellows gave me a tour of the ranch recently and said, “As a 501(c)(3) charity we rely solely on the generosity of donors for food, litter, toys and monetary donations to keep the ranch operating.”

The cost of vaccinations, spaying/neutering and initial medications averages around \$250 — for each cat. Food and litter costs vary from \$10,000-\$12,000 per month.

Adoptions can be handled directly through the ranch, but the most effective adoption events take place off site. Volunteers are on hand at adoption events to answer questions about adopting, volunteering, fostering or donating. You can find Forever Home Feline Ranch with adoptable cats the 1st and 4th Saturday of every month from 12-3 at Ace Hardware, 1600 Wabash Ave in Springfield and at Pet Smart, 3183 S. Veterans Parkway in Springfield every Saturday and Sunday from 12-4.

Before going to their forever home, all cats & kittens are spayed or neutered, up-to-date on age appropriate vaccines, tested for Feline Leukemia (FeLV) and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV), dewormed, treated with flea prevention and microchipped. The adoption fee is \$50, which doesn't come close to covering expenses for care while at the ranch, but helps offset the costs of caring for the cats and kittens. If you are considering adopting, especially at the off site events, get your application in beforehand for approval. Applications can be found online at felineranch.org. Available cats and kittens can be found on the ranch's website, Facebook page and on petfinder.org.

Not everyone can adopt a cat, for a variety of reasons. But assistance is always needed and you can still help in many other areas:

- Sewing & crafting for cat mats, cat toys, etc. that are either used at the ranch or sold to raise funds
- Adoption events - set up & clean up, cat care, adoption counselors
- Fostering - provide a home environment for kittens & cats awaiting adoption - FHFR provides food, litter, supplies, and vet care
- Marketing & fundraising
- Grant writing (experience preferred)
- Photography - take pictures of adoptable cats & kittens, event photos
- Adoptable pet profile writing for PetFinder & other listings
- Transportation - donation pick up, supply drop off, vet visits
- Socializing cats and kittens
- Cleaning
- Maintenance & minor repair
- Distributing and posting flyers
- Getting the word out about FHFR, events, adoptable cats
- Monetary donations to provide food, shelter, and veterinary care to felines before going to their forever homes and while they are living at the ranch. Donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by Section 170 of the Internal Revenue Code.

Wish list items that are always needed include:

- food and litter
- purina cat and kitten chow
- arm & hammer scoopable litter
- friskies pate canned food
- cat toys and cat nip
- pet carriers
- laser pointers
- office supplies like copy paper, stamps, envelopes, file folders
- cleaning supplies (paper towels, disinfecting wipes, Odoban cleaner)
- gift cards (Sam's club, PetSmart, JoAnn's Fabric, Walmart, Chewy.com and Visa gift cards)

A fundraiser for FHFR will be held on Saturday, April 27th, hosted by Taylorville Yoga Studio. Cats & Mats will provide a unique yoga experience WITH KITTENS. Proceeds go to FHFR. On site adoptions will be held at Cats & Mats as well. Book at taylorvilleyogastudio.com.

For more information about making a difference in the community and the life of these cats email fhfrvolunteer@gmail.com or call or text 217-503-9898. Follow Forever Home Feline Ranch on Facebook to stay updated on new arrivals, urgent needs, success stories, upcoming events and more.

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