



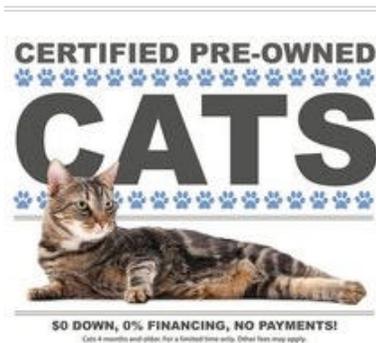
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Summer is cat season at shelters, now overflowing

AP Associated Press

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AP - This poster released by the Michigan Humane Society shows the poster for 'Catfax' which allows would ...

By LINDA LOMBARDI, For The Associated Press - Mon Aug 17, 2:43 pm ET
Patrick Boehringer of Canton, Mich., couldn't be a more satisfied customer. He calls Apricot, his Certified Pre-Owned Cat, "the best animal I ever had."

Apricot came with a free "multipoint inspection" including spay/neuter surgery, vaccinations, behavioral evaluation and grooming. And you can't beat the price: As the Certified Pre-Owned Cats campaign poster says, with no money down, no financing and no payments, these cats are "better than new!"

The Michigan Humane Society's clever ad campaign is an effort to draw attention to a problem that shelters all over the country are dealing with: the large number of adult cats looking for homes.

Mike Robbins, director of marketing and communications for the Michigan Humane Society, says that in the shelter world, "summer has always been known as cat season." With cats normally breeding in the warm weather, shelters are deluged with kittens and have trouble finding homes for their adult cats.

Economic conditions seem to be aggravating the problem this year. At the Animal Protection Society of Durham, N.C., director of community outreach Simon Woodrup says that the number of pets they took in June, for example, is up to 825 this year, from fewer than 700 last year.

At the Santa Fe, N.M., Humane Society, they're calling it "Summer of 100 Cats," and adoption supervisor Mark Young says "we probably should have called it 500."

Kittens still get adopted quickly, says Dori Villalon, vice president of the San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, but it's harder to find homes for adult cats than for kittens or dogs.

"Cats outnumber dogs three-to-one at our shelter," she says. "The pet overpopulation problem in this country has really become a cat overpopulation problem."

Simon says that the economy seems to be a factor in many cases, judging by owner-surrender questionnaires. "The one thing that we have seen a lot of is people saying I can't afford it," he says.

Part of the problem is that people who are forced to move, either because of foreclosure or simply needing to downsize, can have a hard time finding pet-friendly apartments, Young says. These owner

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surrenders are likely to be the adult animals, which are harder to place.

As a result, shelters all over the country have been inspired to offer special no-fee or reduced fee adults cat adoption specials. In the past, shelters worried about whether no-fee adoptions would reduce the value that people placed on their pets, and Robbins said that the Michigan Humane Society considered this carefully before offering their program.

In fact, in their trial program, and in a study conducted by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, there was no difference between people who'd adopted for free and those who had paid a fee.

"We've found there's been no increase in return rates, which are already low as it is," he says.

Robbins attributes this success to the fact that they use the same thorough adoption process to make sure that the animal is going to a home that's a good fit, as in the case of the Boehringer family. It was the adoption counselor's assistance and detailed questions that brought them together with a cat that will play fetch with his 17-month-old son.

"They actually roll around on the ground together," Boehringer said. "When the cat wants to play it jumps on my son and they go off running."

The Michigan Humane Society is so pleased with the success of the no-fee program that they're extending it for the foreseeable future. And all over the country, shelter owners are hoping people will check out their own pre-owned cats, "certified" or not.

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On the Net:

Michigan Human Society: <http://www.michiganhumane.org/>

Santa Fe Humane Society: <http://www.sfhumanesociety.org/>

San Francisco SPCA: <http://www.sfpca.org>

Animal Protection Society of Durham: <http://www.apsodurham.org/>

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