

Paws Up for Pets

Not all cats are aloof; in fact, some make purrfect therapy animals

The time is long overdue to salute a small but vital population group: certified therapy cats. Yep, it turns out that while these cats are small in numbers compared with therapy dogs, the impact they make on people is huge in terms of boosting our attitudes and more.

Just ask Paige Finkelstein, a medical doctor who has logged dozens of therapy visits at senior centers in Boca Raton and New York City with her tri-colored feline she named Cat. Yes, Cat.

"I adopted her in 2020 from the Broward Humane Society and I named her Cat after the feline named Cat from the movie *Breakfast at Tiffany's*," says Finkelstein. "Cat has a great demeanor and greets everyone she meets with a loud, audible purr."

Paige, whose parents, Pam and David Finkelstein, reside in Boca Raton, is now in New York City completing her surgical fellowship. She and Cat completed the therapy cat certification through Pet Partners, a major organization that has supported thousands of therapy pet-people teams all over the world.

"Cat did a great job in her therapy training and evaluation and is naturally well mannered," says Finkelstein. "I take her on a pink harness and leash to senior living places. Some residents seeing and petting her begin talking about their cats that they loved so fondly. Therapy cats bring back happy memories."

I, too, know the impact a therapy cat can make. Casey, my long-legged orange tabby, has been making visits to senior centers, schools, animal shelters and other places since 2018 with another national group called Love on a Leash.



A cat named Cat cuddles with a resident at a senior center. Photo provided by Paige Finkelstein

Like Cat, Casey sports a loud purr. He loves learning new tricks and is always game to sniff out a new place and meet all types of people. On our second visit to a memory care center, one of the residents named Peggy spotted Casey entering the activity room. According to staff, Peggy rarely spoke, but her eyes lit up and she yelled, "Peggy loves Casey! Peggy loves Casey!"

The staff and I were stunned — in a good way — by this reaction. Since then, Casey has earned the nickname Pet Safety Cat Casey, as he teams up with Kona, my terrier mix, to conduct hands-on, veterinarian-approved pet first-aid classes with my Pet First Aid

4U program. Casey has traveled now to 15 states.

"Anecdotally, we've always known that people share meaningful relationships with cats, reflected in the number of requests we receive from facilities wanting therapy cat visits," says Taylor Chastain Griffin, Ph.D., national director of the animal-assisted interventions program at Pet Partners.

Pet Partners recently completed a one-of-a-kind study on the impact therapy cat teams make by partnering up with Cat Person, a company that donates 1% of its sales of cat food and other products to study the connection between cats and people.

Got a therapy cat in the making?

If you believe your cat has the temperament and willingness to be a goodwill ambassador to people in senior living centers, hospitals, schools and other places, here are two major therapy training organizations to check out:

- **Pet Partners:** <https://petpartners.org>
- **Love on a Leash:** www.loveonaleash.org

Each of these nonprofit organizations offers guidelines on their pet-people therapy team programs for dogs, cats, horses and other companion animals.

"We teamed up with Pet Partners to put data behind what we know to be true — that cats are loving, intuitive beings that improve the mental health and wellness of humans," says Meghan Knoll, CEO of Cat Person.

Study researchers interviewed 63 certified cat therapy teams and received input from managers at senior centers and other places that welcome therapy cat visits. About 200 cat-therapy teams are certified through Pet Partners. In the study, most therapy cats were 6 years or older and had been adopted from a rescue group or animal shelter or found as strays.

"We are excited to have completed, to our knowledge, the most comprehensive study on cats as therapy animals and to share results that call for a greater appreciation of the cat-human bond," says Griffin.

You can see the complete

study by visiting petpartners.org and clicking on "publications." It reports these key findings:

- None of the participants reported that they ever feel having a cat visit is more trouble than it's worth. These included residential treatment centers, assisted living/nursing homes, schools and hospitals.

- Residential facility managers reported that depression and anxiety in clients decreased by more than two-thirds after therapy cat teams began making regular visits. By lesser margins cat visits increased verbalization among senior center residents and improved their willingness to eat.

- Both cat team handlers and facility managers noted that therapy cat visits increased the sharing of stories about their own cats among residents.

Griffin's hope is that this study helps to dispel stereotypes that all cats are standoffish and unable to be trained.

For Paige Finkelstein, sharing her life with Cat provides her with daily benefits.

"Being in my surgical fellowship, my days are long and can be very stressful," she says. "But when I come home, Cat is there doing her butt wiggles and being happy and excited to see me. She definitely helps me with stress relief."

Arden Moore is an author, speaker and master certified pet first-aid instructor. She hosts a radio show, Arden Moore's Four Legged Life (www.fourleggedlife.com), and the weekly Oh Behave! podcast on PetLifeRadio.com. Learn more by visiting www.ardenmoore.com.



12/7 - Music & Crafts at Delray Beach Public Library, 100 W Atlantic Ave. Age 3-5. 3:30-4:30 pm. Free. Registration: 561-266-0197; delraylibrary.org

12/7 - Family Lego Challenge at Boca Raton Public Library, 400 NW 2nd Ave. All ages. 4-5 pm. Free. Registration: 561-393-7968; bocalibrary.org

12/7 - Community Workers & Helpers at Boynton Beach City Library, 100 E Ocean Ave. Age 5-12. Held again 1/4. 4:30-5:30 pm. Free. Registration: 561-742-6393; boyntonlibrary.org

Friday - 12/8 - Outdoor Storytime at Boynton Beach City Library under the Banyan tree, 100 E Ocean Ave. Stories, rhymes, more. Held again 12/20 & 1/3 10-10:30 am. Free. 561-742-6390; boyntonlibrary.org

12/8 - Baby Bookworm at Boca Raton Public Library, 400 NW 2nd Ave. Storytime for infants accompanied by an adult. Age 0 months to non-walking. 11-11:30 am. Free. Registration: 561-393-7852; bocalibrary.org

12/8 - Play & Learn for Babies at Boca Raton Public Library, 400 NW 2nd Ave. Learn literacy skills during playtime. Age 0 months to non-walking. 11:30 am-noon. Free. 561-393-7968; bocalibrary.org

12/8 - Anime Club at Delray Beach Public Library, 100 W Atlantic Ave. Age 13-17. Held again 12/22. 3:30-5:30 pm. Free. Registration: 561-266-0197; delraylibrary.org

12/9 - Holiday Hoops Basketball Tournament at Hester Center, 1901 N Seacrest Blvd, Boynton Beach. Age 11-14. 9 am-4 pm. \$170/resident; \$231/non-resident. 561-742-6550; boynton-beach.org

DECEMBER 10-16

Sunday - 12/10 - Chess Moves: Tournament Play at Boca Raton Public Library, 400 NW 2nd Ave. Age 6+. 9:30 am-4:30 pm. Free. Registration: 561-393-7968; bocalibrary.org

12/10 - Rookie Rooks: Introduction to Chess for Youth at Boca Raton Public Library, 400 NW 2nd Ave. Age 9-12. 10:30-11:30 am. Free. Registration: 561-393-7968; bocalibrary.org

Monday - 12/11 - Kindergarten Readiness Story Time with Ms. Tea at Catherine Strong Splash Park, 1500 SW 6th St, Delray Beach. Age 3-5. 10 am. Free. Registration: 561-266-0194; delraylibrary.org

12/11 - Mindful Monday at Boynton Beach City Library, 100 E Ocean Ave. Age 13-17. 5-6:30 pm. Free. 561-742-6390; boyntonlibrary.org

12/11 - Audition Workshop at Lake Worth Playhouse, 713 Lake Ave. Grades 7-8. 5-8 pm. \$125. 561-586-6410; lakeworthplayhouse.org

Wednesday - 12/13 - Suzy Hammer Storytime at Boynton Beach City Library, 100 E Ocean Ave. Held again 12/27. 10-10:30 am. Free. 561-742-6390; boyntonlibrary.org

12/13 - Ms. Lovely's Playdate at Delray Beach Public Library, 100 W Atlantic Ave. Interactive play. Age 3-5. 6-7 pm. Free. Registration: 561-266-0194; delraylibrary.org

12/13 - Pop-Up Pages at Boca Raton Public Library, 400 NW 2nd Ave. Age 0-5. Held again 12/19 (10-10:30 am), 12/28 & 1/5 (10-10:30 am). 6:30-7 pm. Free. Registration: 561-393-7968; bocalibrary.org

Friday - 12/15 - Winter Art Make & Take at

Boca Raton Public Library, 400 NW 2nd Ave. All ages. 3-4 pm. Free. Registration: 561-393-7968; bocalibrary.org

Saturday - 12/16 - Little Wonders at Gumbo Limbo Nature Center, 1801 N Ocean Blvd, Boca Raton. Hike, crafts, stories. Age 3-4 w/an adult. 10-11 am. \$8/resident & member; \$10/non-member. Reservations: 561-544-8605; gumbolimbo.org

12/16 - Madden NFL Tournament at Hester Center, 1901 N Seacrest Blvd, Boynton Beach. Age 12-14. 10 am-2 pm. \$10/resident; \$13/non-resident. 561-742-6550; boynton-beach.org

12/16 - Blissful Yoga at Delray Beach Public Library, 100 W Atlantic Ave. Age 13-17. 10-11 am. Free. Registration: 561-266-0194; delraylibrary.org

12/16 - STEM Camp: Specialty Program - Hour of Code at Delray Beach Public Library, 100 W Atlantic Ave. Age 3-17. 10:30-11:45 am. Free. Registration: 561-266-0194; delraylibrary.org

12/16 - Nature Detectives at Gumbo Limbo Nature Center, 1801 N Ocean Blvd, Boca Raton. New mystery each month. Age 5-6 w/an adult. 11:30 am. \$8/resident & member; \$10/non-member. Reservations: 561-544-8605; gumbolimbo.org

DECEMBER 17-23

Monday - 12/18 - Story Chasers Book Club at Delray Beach Public Library, 100 W Atlantic Ave. Age 6-8. 3:30-4:30 pm. Free. Registration: 561-266-0194; delraylibrary.org

12/18 - Teen Advisory Board Meeting at Delray Beach Public Library, 100 W Atlantic

Ave. 5-6 pm. Free. Registration: 561-266-0194; delraylibrary.org

Tuesday - 12/19 - Teen Graphic Novel Talks: DPS Only! by Velinx at Boca Raton Public Library, 400 NW 2nd Ave. Age 13-17. 6-7 pm. Free. Registration: 561-393-7968; bocalibrary.org

Thursday - 12/21 - K-Pop Club at Delray Beach Public Library, 100 W Atlantic Ave. Age 13-17. 3-4 pm. Free. Registration: 561-266-0197; delraylibrary.org

DECEMBER 24-30

Tuesday - 12/26 - Library on the Go! Umoja (Unity) Day Kwanzaa Celebration at Spady Cultural Heritage Museum, 170 NW 5th Ave, Delray Beach. Each month librarian drives Library on the Go golf cart to a different location for an engaging pop-up library program. Age 4-11. 2:30-4 pm. Free. 561-266-0194; delraylibrary.org

12/26-29 - Pop Up Winter Break Camp at The Studio at Mizner Park, 201 Plaza Real, Boca Raton. Age 3-8 (must be fully potty trained). Held again 1/2-5. 9 am-noon. \$260/4 days; \$75/day. 561-203-3742; thestudioatmiznerpark.com

12/26-29 - Winter Break Junior Tennis Camp at Boca Raton Tennis Center, 271 NW Boca Raton Blvd. Age 6-15. Held again 1/2-5. 9 am-noon. \$43-\$53.75/day; \$137.60-\$172/week. 561-393-7978; myboca.us/704/Boca-Raton-Tennis-Center

Wednesday - 12/27 - Math Magicians: Improve Your Math Skills at Boynton Beach City Library, 100 E Ocean Ave. Grades 2-5. 5-6 pm. Free. 561-742-6390; boyntonlibrary.org

12/27-18 - Holiday Break Camp at Sims Center, 225 NW 12th Ave, Boynton Beach. Age 5-12. M-F 7:30 am-5:30 pm. \$208/resident; \$260/non-resident. 561-742-6640; boynton-beach.org

12/27-29 - Winter Break Camp at Gumbo Limbo Nature Center, 1801 N Ocean Blvd, Boca Raton. Games, crafts, educational activities. Learn about the importance of caring for/protecting sea turtles, other marine life. Age 6-8. 8:30 am-noon. Per day \$30/member; \$37.50/non-member. Reservations: 561-544-8605; gumbolimbo.org

Thursday - 12/28 - Creature Feature (PG) at Boynton Beach City Library, 100 E Ocean Ave. Age 13-17. 2-4 pm. Free. 561-742-6390; boyntonlibrary.org

12/28 - Picture Book Club at Boynton Beach City Library, 100 E Ocean Ave. Age 5-12. 4:30-5:30 pm. Free. Registration: 561-742-6393; boyntonlibrary.org

DEC. 31-JAN. 6

Tuesday - 1/2 - Tween Book Jam at Boca Raton Public Library, 400 NW 2nd Ave. Age 9-12. 6-7 pm. Free. Registration: 561-393-7968; bocalibrary.org

1/2-5 - Surf School at Red Reef Park, 1400 N Ocean Blvd, Boca Raton. Age 5-14. 9 am-3 pm; After care 3-5 pm. Day camp \$303-\$379; after care \$20-\$25 daily. 561-393-7807; myboca.us/Facilities/Facility/Details/Red-Reef-Park-49

1/2-5 - Winter Break Theatre Camp at Lake Worth Playhouse, 713 Lake Ave. Age 7-15. M-F 9 am-4 pm. \$300/child. 561-586-6410; lakeworthplayhouse.org