

Partly Sunny with a Chance of Betty

BY MARY TAN



Tune into Jeff Lyons' 10 p.m. weather forecast on WFIE-TV in Evansville, Indiana, and you'll get more than just the Doppler radar and an above-average dewpoint. You'll get an up-to-the-minute forecast with a chance of Betty. Betty the weather cat, that is! The once homeless feline is a newly minted internet sensation whose fluffiness on a weather map can be seen across the globe.

Jeff is the chief meteorologist at the NBC affiliate station, where he's been working from home because of the coronavirus pandemic. Set up in his dining room, Jeff has a weather computer, camera and lots of lights for his nightly broadcasts. Not one to miss anything exciting, his curious kitty is always there as he gets ready to deliver his nightly weathercast.

Betty becomes a TV star

At first, Jeff was hesitant to let his pet share the spotlight with him, but one day during a commercial break, his director saw him playing with Betty. He encouraged Jeff to put her on air.

"As a meteorologist, you want a certain amount of credibility, you're the station's scientist, so I wasn't so sure about it," Jeff says. "But I did it anyway." That night he did the weather with Betty at his side and ended the segment with her cradled in his arms.

Jeff put the video of that forecast on his Facebook page, and it took off. Within three days the video had 100,000 views.

"My nephew told me Betty was on Reddit," Jeff says. "I was shocked. Requests from around the world started pouring in. Everyone wanted more and more Betty."

She's now officially part of the station's weather team and was granted her very own "lower third graphic" on all of Jeff's reports.

"Each night we try to find a way to work her way into the forecasts," he says. "Viewers want to see her more, so I put up a card table in front of the green screen, put a cardboard box on top of it and covered the box with a blanket so Betty could sit higher."

Betty's beginnings

Jeff got his first cat back in 2011. "We had a cat named Merv who had

died, and at the time my 10-year-old daughter, Natalie, was begging for a cat," he says. "One day Betty showed up at our house meowing and hungry. We fed her and decided she could live on our screened porch. Within days that cat moved into the house and within a few weeks she was sleeping on my chest. We named her Betty, in honor of my Aunt Betty, who loved cats."

Jeff got her spayed immediately, and their veterinarian believes she was about 2 years old when she ended up at their front door. "She's such a good cat and a great companion," Jeff says. "We think she's about 11 years old now. Betty's like a lot of cats, very loyal and very independent. Everything is on her own terms."

Betty's future

Since he started delivering his weather forecasts from home, Betty's always there. "She loves it," he says. "She knows something is up when I turn on the lights." But Jeff does wonder how he will keep Betty's fans happy and balance the need to get important weather news out to Evansville area viewers. "If there's a tornado →

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and emergency information people need to know, I'll probably have to put Betty in the basement so she isn't a distraction. I know right now people are really looking at her rather than paying attention to the weather."

The other issue is what will happen once the coronavirus pandemic passes and Jeff returns to the television studio to do his forecasts. "I'm not sure how Betty will do if I take her outside of the house," he says. "I think she's most comfortable here."

Jeff has started doing Facebook Lives featuring Betty, and he's getting thousands of views and questions from Betty fans all over the world. He's shown Betty drinking water out of his glass, Betty getting bribed with tuna and Betty licking ice directly out of his glass. Many fans wonder if the internet superstar is a Norwegian Forest Cat or a Maine Coon. The weather personality says he's not really sure.

Jeff and his family are in disbelief over the worldwide appreciation of their cat. He believes Betty is a welcome distraction to all the negative news going on in the world.

"If Betty can be a positive influence

Want more Betty? Check out videos of Jeff and Betty's weather reports on Facebook @JeffLyons-14News.

and make people happy, I want to support them and give people what they want," Jeff says. "We're just so humbled and flattered by all of this."

For Betty, fame hasn't really caught up with her. As long as she gets plenty of treats and pets, the attention isn't that big of a deal. It's just life as normal with a human, who just happens to tell people about the weather. 🐾



Mary Tan is a Minnesota pet writer and a former television journalist who worked in some of the country's largest markets. She is also the chief storyteller at Whisker Media, a pet communications agency, whose mission is to help homeless cats.

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