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TO THE RESCUE

Foster families provide a pipeline to new homes for abandoned animals **PG 16**

Developer brings in partner on stalled Towson Row project **PG 4**



JEN RYNDAL/BSMG STAFF

Marshall and Anne Henslee with their children Eli, right, 18, and Julia, 13, and some of their pets, including cat Peter, front left, dog Mary, cat Michael and foster cat Maggie, right, at their home in Towson.



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To the RESCUE

Foster families provide a pipeline to new homes for abandoned animals.



JEN RYNDA/BSMG STAFF PHOTOS

Julia Henslee, 13, snuggles with her family's one-eyed cat, Cody, at their Towson home.

**BY JON BLEIWEIS
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Anne Henslee, of Towson, has been rescuing animals her entire life. As a child growing up in Roland Park, she didn't know of formal foster programs but would often take in stray cats or dogs.

When she began dating her husband, Marshall Henslee, the pair began fostering cats. The family affair now continues with her two children, 13-year-old Julia and 18-year-old Eli Henslee.

Henslee estimates she has fostered "hundreds" of cats with her husband since 1995.

Her latest foster pet, Kit Kat, a 3-year-old tabby with a speck of orange on her nose, has a cleft palette and no teeth, but is affectionately sweet, Henslee said.

"Often, if you don't have a background taking care of cats with special needs it's hard to find fosters for them," Henslee said. "We can fit that niche, and we as a family foster and care for them. We're lucky that we're all in it together."

Even with all of her experience, Henslee said she considers a couple of her fosters "failures."

As a foster parent to cats, the 46-year-old has decided to adopt the animal herself, rather than return it to the shelter for someone else to adopt.

"We love it when a foster [parent] fails,"

Gary Klunk, a management analyst for the Baltimore County Department of Animal Services, said.

Henslee has been fairly successful. Just one of her six pets — five cats and a dog that only gets along with cats — were in a foster program when she and her family ultimately adopted them.

"If you rescue one cat, that frees up a cage at one of the local shelters, so for every one cat you foster you save a minimum of two lives," Henslee said. "It also brings joy to the families that eventually help adopt the cats that you help save."

In the meantime, now is the season when the majority of kittens are born.

That means there's scrambling going on

in Baldwin, home of Baltimore County's animal services department and shelter. Between four and 40 newborn kittens can arrive on a given day, in need of help and a home, Klunk said. Baltimore County opened a new \$6.6 million, 22,400 square foot animal services building in 2016.

A cat can have up to three litters in a year, Klunk said, adding that the typical litter size varies from two to seven.

Traditionally, the season lasts from the spring to late summer, Klunk said. Last year, a mild winter meant the season ran to December. This year, the first litters arrived in the beginning of March. With only about 100 spots for cats at the shelter, there's not enough room to house the animals at the rate they arrive, Klunk said.

That's where the foster parents come in.

"A lot of times, the animals in need of foster [care] are animals that would be euthanized if foster [care] was not available," Klunk said, adding that the county is trying to increase its foster parent base.

A spokeswoman for the Baltimore County Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees the animal services department, said there are about 60 foster parents in the program, including employees.

Puppies and kittens can't be adopted until they're 8 weeks old, according to county code. The shelter relies on volunteer foster parents to nurse and socialize the pets until that time, when many become quickly adopted.

The county provides instructions, support and a kitten milk replacement for the foster parents until the kitten is old enough to return to the shelter.

Foster parents must be county residents and able to take the animal to regular check-up visits at the shelter for no charge. Convicted animal abusers are not eligible for the program. Applications can be approved on the same day they're submitted, Klunk said.

In the first quarter of 2017, the release rate — the percentage of animals that leave the shelter — for cats jumped to 91.7 percent from 55.4 percent in the same quarter of 2014. The release rate for dogs in that time also increased, from 90.4 percent to 92.8 percent. Both 2017 figures are record highs.

Inga Fricke, director of pet retention programs with The Humane Society of the United States, said most shelters around the country are not required to report release rates, making it difficult to establish a national benchmark.

Foster care has been embraced nationwide, she said, adding that it allows for shelters to assist more animals than they could in their physical buildings.

"Every shelter around the country is working for the day when no one ever has to euthanize a healthy adoptable animal anymore," she said. "We're all working toward programs and initiatives to make sure as many animals are placed or released live."

In recent years, shelters have taken a "shelter neuter return" approach for community cats that are thriving, Fricke said. The best course of action for shelters may be not to take them in, where they may not be adopted, but have them neutered and returned to where they live.

Veterinarians are able to examine the cat to determine whether the animal has a good quality of life in the community it



Foster cats Maggie, left, and Peter on the coffee table at the Henslee house.



Gary Klunk, of Baltimore County Animal Services, at the Baldwin shelter.

lives in, she said.

"When you take a cat that is thriving, has a stable food source and shelter, just make sure it's not contributing to overpopulation," she said. "That's the best outcome for that particular cat."

'They need it'

The shelter also reported that the number of animals admitted in the shelter rose from 732 in the first quarter of 2014 to 1,200 in the first quarter of 2017, an increase of nearly 60 percent.

Michelle Green, a 51-year-old from Arbutus, said she has cared for more than 300 animals since she started volun-

teering with the Baltimore Animal Rescue and Care Shelter, a Baltimore City-based nonprofit, five years ago.

A saleswoman for a moving company, she spends 60 percent to 70 percent of her working hours at home, which allows her to keep an eye on her fosters, along with her 14 other pets — two dogs and a dozen cats.

That includes taking care of what's known as "bottle babies," newborn kittens that require to be fed every two hours. As they get older, they are required to be fed less frequently.

She converted a spare bedroom into a foster room and can have up to four litters at a time, in addition to her 12 cats and two

dogs.

She's often asked how and why she fosters animals — while the typical foster parent may take care of 15 animals per year, she does about 70. She said she can sum it up in two brief points.

"I can and they need it," she said.

Green said she spends \$5,000 to \$8,000 on food and supplies per year for her foster animals. She started a second business selling leggings online to cover some of the costs.

Henslee said foster parents typically bring in animals that are unlikely to be adopted, such as ones with medical conditions that might require around-the-clock care initially.

When she first started fostering, she noticed that a need existed for people to care for cats that had been mistreated or not received proper medical care.

"They end up in shelters and get put to sleep, but a few of the lucky ones end up in foster care," Henslee said. "We've been fortunate enough to help many achieve the treatment they require and followup care."

One of Henslee's cats, Cody, a one-eyed black and gray tabby, was hit in the eye with a BB gun. The BB had lodged in his eye socket and broken his chin, she said.

"He's an older cat but we fell in love with him," Henslee said. "We got him the treatment he needed and decided in his last few years of life he'd be with us."