

# DAKIN STORIES

How a Touch  
Transforms



DAKIN HUMANE SOCIETY · SUMMER 2018

## Message from Dakin's Executive Director



*Dakin Stories* is published three times a year by the Development Office for donors who make an annual gift of \$100 or more, Leadership Society members, Guardian monthly supporters, and members of Dakin's Legacy Society.

Cover: Dakin cat Mimi is shown learning how to offer a high five.

Dear Friend,

For all you cat lovers out there...we've got your summer reading right here! In this issue of *Dakin Stories*, you'll learn about two of the most ambitious programs we've tackled in some time, each of them reflecting our goal to provide services that address needs; the Jackson Galaxy Cat Pawsitive Pro program and our Free Feral Spay Day Clinic.

We were thrilled when Dakin was one of 10 shelters nationwide to be selected for the 2018 spring semester of the Jackson Galaxy Cat Pawsitive Pro (CPP) program. CPP was created to provide adult shelter cats with enrichment via training. Staff and volunteers learned to teach cats to be more interactive with people and perform tricks like giving a high five. Because the program also required significant data entry, social media presence and other efforts, several departments at Dakin pulled together, showing their versatility and dedication to making CPP a resounding success. When you get a team of so many like-minded people together, even cats will give you a high five for that, and your gifts can ensure that this innovative program can help Dakin cats for years to come!

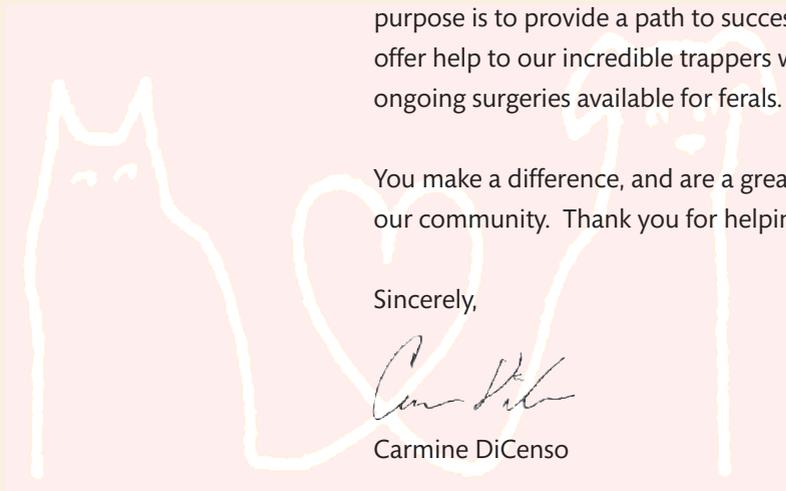
Dakin now offers Free Feral Spay Day Clinics at our Springfield Adoption & Education Center. For people who humanely trap feral cats for spaying and neutering—and then return them to their outdoor colonies—this clinic provides the surgeries at no expense. We created this program in response to what we've been seeing at Dakin for some time; more and more litters of kittens being brought in that were born to feral mothers. And those are the lucky ones... most feral litters aren't rescued by Good Samaritans. They face unbearable hardships and suffering, and half of them don't live through their first year. The clinic's purpose is to provide a path to success for these adult ferals. We're also very happy to offer help to our incredible trappers who care for them, and your support will keep these ongoing surgeries available for ferals.

You make a difference, and are a great example of how positive changes can happen in our community. Thank you for helping to guide these animals to better futures.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carmine DiCenso".

Carmine DiCenso





## Enriching Lives

*Samantha Renaud, Dakin staff member and Cat Pawsitive Pro trainer, connects with Meow during an enrichment session at Dakin Humane Society this spring.*

FAMED CAT BEHAVIOR EXPERT Jackson Galaxy places a high priority on what he calls “Cat Mojo.” He defines it as becoming a cat detective and being able to figure out how cats see the world. This led him to create the Cat Pawsitive Pro program, which shows shelter staff and volunteers how to offer enrichment to shelter cats and teach them tricks to make them more attractive to adopters.

The free 12-week program, which Dakin undertook from February through May, is made available to select shelters nationwide. A team of Dakin staff and volunteers attended weekly webinars, led by instructors from The Jackson Galaxy Project, which is a Signature Program of GreaterGood.org. They learned how to teach Dakin cats to do simple things like offering a slow blink, or more elaborate tricks like jumping through a hoop or giving humans a high five. For five days a week, roving teams of Cat Pawsitive trainers could be found throughout the building visiting Dakin cats in cages, colony rooms and offices for twice-daily interactions.

One of the goals of the program is that shelters “pay it forward.” Dakin staffer Alanna Regan, who was named main team lead for the project notes, “Even though the training ended, my work is just starting. We’ll now take

what we learned from this program and use it as a template to train future staff members and volunteers who will be caring for our shelter cats.”

Team members took fastidious notes about each cat’s behavior. Volunteer photographers devoted many hours to capturing countless training moments, and if any cat in the program was adopted, he and his people would be photographed for social media just before they left Dakin. Facebook posts featuring the felines were being created and shared among the Dakin team, fellow shelters enrolled in the program, and The Jackson Galaxy Project’s Facebook page.

According to Dakin Executive Director Carmine DiCenso, “The program is incredibly innovative for its focus on enhancing the lives of adult cats in our care. The training helps shy and reserved cats become more comfortable while in a shelter which helps them get adopted. More than 40 cats were adopted during the training period.”

“From the very first day of the program, the Cat Pawsitive Pro team at Dakin just knocked my socks off with their enthusiasm, commitment and tireless work to make the program a success,” says Christie Rogero of The Jackson

Galaxy Project, the program manager for Cat Pawsitive. “It seemed like every day they would share something new that made me smile, like stories about nervous Rusty Meyer, a cat brought out of his shell; photos of the silly and talented Meow; the absolutely brimming-with-happiness adoption photo of Chloe and her new parents . . . I could go on and on.”

In early April we learned that The Jackson Galaxy Project would be celebrating National High-Five Day on April 19 by picking a photo or video of a cat high-fiving a human. Submissions were welcome from anyone, inside or outside the animal welfare industry. The grand prize would be \$5,000 from GreaterGood.org, and 10,000 bowls of food courtesy of Halo® pet food. The Dakin team leapt into action, rehearsing, photographing and videotaping the best of their feline high-fivers.

One of them was a sweet-natured, grey and orange 3 year old named Mimi who had a significant injury to her front left leg. Despite the pain, Mimi had been giving high-fives using that leg. A couple of weeks before the contest

deadline, she underwent an amputation when attempts to save her leg had failed. After a week of recovery, Mimi was back in the high-five game, balancing herself on her back paws while rearing up to land a high five with her remaining front paw. Bethany Terry, a Dakin staff member and part of the training team, captured a video of a now 3-legged Mimi delivering the goods.

On April 19, The Jackson Galaxy Project announced that the winner of its National High-Five Contest was . . . the video of Mimi and Bethany!

By a conservative estimate, more than 500 hours had been devoted to the program during its run. Your support of Dakin allowed us to assign several staff members to fulfill its promise to help shelter cats today and in the years ahead, and every victorious moment—big and small—is shared with you. Thank you for being part of this success plan for cats that we will proudly carry forward. We hope we can count on your support to keep this program thriving.

“The Dakin team exemplified the best of Cat Pawsitive Pro,” states Christie. “It brings me so much joy to know that they will build on their experience in the program and use the skills they gained to train more staff and volunteers. Their impact on cats will be beyond amazing.”

Now that’s Cat Mojo.



*Above: Shelter cats like Mimi will enjoy enrichment sessions provided by volunteers who are trained in the Jackson Galaxy Cat Pawsitive Pro method by other volunteers. Right: The award-winning team of Mimi and Bethany Terry.*



# Curbing the Colonies

THE LOBBY OF DAKIN'S Community Spay/Neuter Clinic was flooded with early morning sunshine when a stream of people, lugging large traps containing feral cats they had caught, arrived for the Free Feral Spay Day Clinic.

Staff members lined up the traps, which were draped with towels and sheets to reduce the stress level of the cats, all of whom were eerily quiet. Domestic cats in carriers, waiting in a veterinarian's office, will usually yowl or meow to show their distress, but a trapped feral's fear translates to silence. Conversations between the trappers and Clinic staff were kept at a low level to help maintain the calm environment.

The Free Feral Spay Day Clinic, the only one of its kind in western Massachusetts, was created by Dakin to offer people who trap feral cats using TNR (trap/neuter/release) procedures an opportunity to get them spayed or neutered at no cost. In order to bring an unowned cat to a free monthly clinic, participants are asked to go online and scheduled how many cats they expect to capture. The night before the Clinic, they bait the traps with food. The following morning the ferals are rounded up and brought to Dakin inside these traps, which double as cages. Following the surgery, the trappers return the cats to their outdoor colonies, where they rejoin the other cats found there.

Just through the lobby door, a mix of more than 20 volunteers and staff gathered around Dakin's Director of Operations Karina King, who was mapping out the flow of events for the day. She assigned teams for each task; the initial intake where the cats would be identified, the process of injecting them with anesthesia (while still in their traps for safety's sake), the pre-surgical shaving, the surgeries themselves, and the steps involved in post-op care: efficiency here makes way for the extensive number of ferals who can be served. The teams can accommodate up to 80 cats during one Feral Spay Day.



*Left: Trappers carry feral cats into the Clinic. Middle: The Intake process begins in the lobby. Bottom: Post-surgical care is administered by Dakin staff and volunteers.*



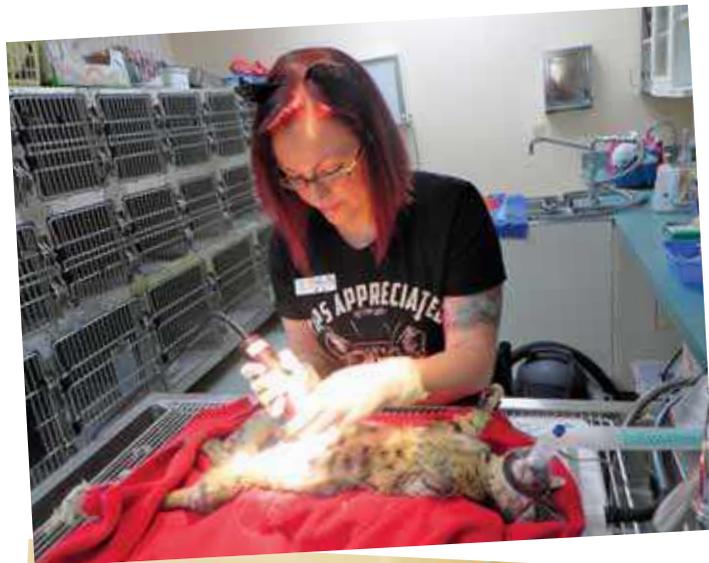
According to Clinic Manager Lynn Sassi, “The goal of these monthly Clinics is to accommodate large numbers of ferals and help alleviate the surplus of colonies. We want to empower people to help these community cats at no cost to them, and we’re hoping that this will drive an interest in becoming more involved in TNR overall. The trappers are the most dedicated people I’ve ever met,” she says, “and they’re emotionally vested in the well-being of the animals.”

Veterinary Technician Abigayle Hamel, one of four vet techs working the Clinic, was assigned to assist Dr. Elizabeth Helton in Operating Room 5 (one of two operating rooms being used), and following Karina’s briefing, Abigayle set to work prepping the O.R. After cleaning the two operating tables and switching on the heaters that warm the patients, she set up the anesthesia machine, tested it, then turned on the pulse oximeters that were adjacent to the tables and would monitor patient heart rates and oxygen levels.

Glancing toward the hallway where colleagues bustled about, she said, “I think it’s absolutely amazing how different groups of people who do different things here can congregate in this small space, get so much done, and be so happy about it. Volunteers support us by doing lots of tasks like giving distemper vaccines and offering preventive care so we can have more space and time to perform the surgeries.”

Dr. Helton and Abigayle’s first patient is carried in and placed on the table. The pair will be performing spay surgeries only; the males will be neutered by another team. Abigayle deftly hooks the cat up to the anesthesia and oxygen machines, then cleanses her shaved abdominal area with a sanitizing scrub and solution. As Dr. Helton performs the surgery, Abigayle hovers over the feline, checking her vitals throughout. Upon conclusion of the procedure, the patient receives a rabies vaccination and a quick examination for other conditions that might be present, like bite wounds or parasites. None are found. A volunteer then takes the towel-wrapped cat down the hall to the area designated for post-op care. The second patient is now waiting on the other operating table.

“By the time Dr. Helton is working on a cat, my job is to be sure there’s another one waiting in the wings,” Abigayle explains.



*Top: Veterinary Technician Meg Delaney shaves patients during surgical prep. Middle and bottom: Dr. Elizabeth Helton, assisted by Veterinary Technician Abigayle Hamel, and Dr. Sherri Therrien spay female colony cats.*



*A feral cat is monitored post-anesthesia for alertness before being released back to his colony.*

She started at Dakin five years ago as an intern, progressed to animal caregiving, and became a vet tech two years ago. Does the fast pace of shelter medicine, especially on a day like this, overwhelm her? “No,” Abigail says with a smile. “It took several internships and going to school to gain familiarity and confidence in it. Now I love being in the O.R. I know my patients are getting my undivided attention and the best care I can give.”

More than 35 cats were brought into both operating rooms that day. All of Abigail’s patients were in overall good shape, with one exception. “We had a cat that had a URI (upper respiratory infection) settling in,” she said, “so we gave her a 14-day antibiotic injection.”

The dedication shown by trappers is remarkable. Their efforts to humanely trap and transport ferals for spay/neuter surgery reflect their passion for helping cats whose lifestyles are risky. Litters born to ferals are extremely vulnerable to the elements, disease and predators, and about half of them die during their first year. They’re literally fighting for their lives every day. Your support of Dakin’s efforts to produce these monthly Clinics enables us to give these trappers a resource for these ferals. Together we can lessen the suffering of these cats who, by nature, are meant to live outside with their colony mates.

The staff and volunteers hope to see more patients at Free Feral Spay Day Clinics. “The fact that we’re welcoming ferals with open arms at this Clinic is very important to me,” states Abigail. “We want trappers to know that we’re here for them and we’re working toward the same goal. I’m excited that we can help the community this way.”



## Celebrate with Dakin

at *Mutts & Mimosas* on September 30 and the *Toasted Owl Gives a Hoot Halloween Fun Run* on October 28. Details available at [dakinhumane.org](http://dakinhumane.org)

- \* Help animals
- \* Have fun with your pet
- \* Meet new friends
- \* Build community
- \* Explore a new venue
- \* Promote Dakin





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## DONOR SPOTLIGHT

*Charlotte Cathro*

*"I have witnessed the unlimited compassion, innovation, and collaborative spirit of Dakin staff and volunteers. Where Dakin is limited, like many nonprofits, is financial capacity. I am so happy that we can help with that through our continued donations." – Charlotte Cathro, foster, donor, and President of Dakin's Board of Directors*

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