

WINTER/SPRING 2024



TREE HOUSE  
HUMANE SOCIETY

# THE CATalyst

TREEHOUSEANIMALS.ORG

## Strengthening Connections





# THE CATalyst

Tree House Humane Society Magazine  
Winter/Spring 2024

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Let us know what you think!  
Email your comments to  
marketing@treehouseanimals.org

**VISION**  
Every Cat Thrives

**MISSION**  
We empower communities of caregivers to protect, nurture, and support new solutions so no cat suffers.

## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I had the incredible opportunity early in my career to listen to former Senator Paul Simon speak. He emphasized the importance of courageous leadership and staying true to your principles, even when it's not popular. That lesson has stuck with me throughout the years.

Right now, animal shelters all over the country are facing a crisis. They're dealing with unprecedented challenges, from staff shortages to an overwhelming number of pets. Leaders are being forced to make difficult decisions.

I want to share with you one decision we made.

Let me tell you a story that has been a year in the making. Her name is Teeny Tina. She was brought to us by a local veterinarian because her family couldn't handle her chronic medical condition. Although she was adopted once and returned, we never gave up on finding her a loving home. After a year of searching, we are thrilled to announce that she finally went home. Within these pages, you'll discover more about Tina, and you'll also meet Cassius, who we're hoping gets a happy ending soon!

For over 50 years, Tree House has been a symbol of hope for cats. We owe this to our amazing community of friends. Unfortunately, we recently lost a dear friend, David Helt. His support extended beyond donations. He and his partner Steven have been with us since 2011, always encouraging collaboration and connecting us to rescues they loved. David's passing has reminded us of what truly matters. We continue to honor David and our true champions for our feline friends.

This past year, Tree House has learned a great deal about courageous leadership – how to adapt, how to rediscover our purpose, and how



to accept difficult situations. We discovered that courage resides within each of us, even when we don't feel brave. Our organization is constantly learning and finding a way. Through the toughest times, our resilience comes from all of you who support us. Within these pages, you'll have the opportunity to learn more about our dedicated team – partners like Vermilion County and Best Friends, donors like Glenn & Rachel Rippie, and dedicated relief veterinarians like Dr. Alycia Eisenstein.

*You empower us to go the extra mile for the cats who need us the most and continue our mission of saving lives. Together, we're making a real difference. Our gratitude knows no bounds. Thank you from all of us at Tree House.*

Raissa Allaire, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



# IT'S BEEN AN AMAZING YEAR, WRAPPING UP 2023 IN FRAMES.

A look back at all of the amazing moments from July through December:

1.

Our 2023 Board of Directors' retreat included a walking tour of Humboldt Park, an important community in our mission to go beyond our shelter walls and bring affordable pet care.



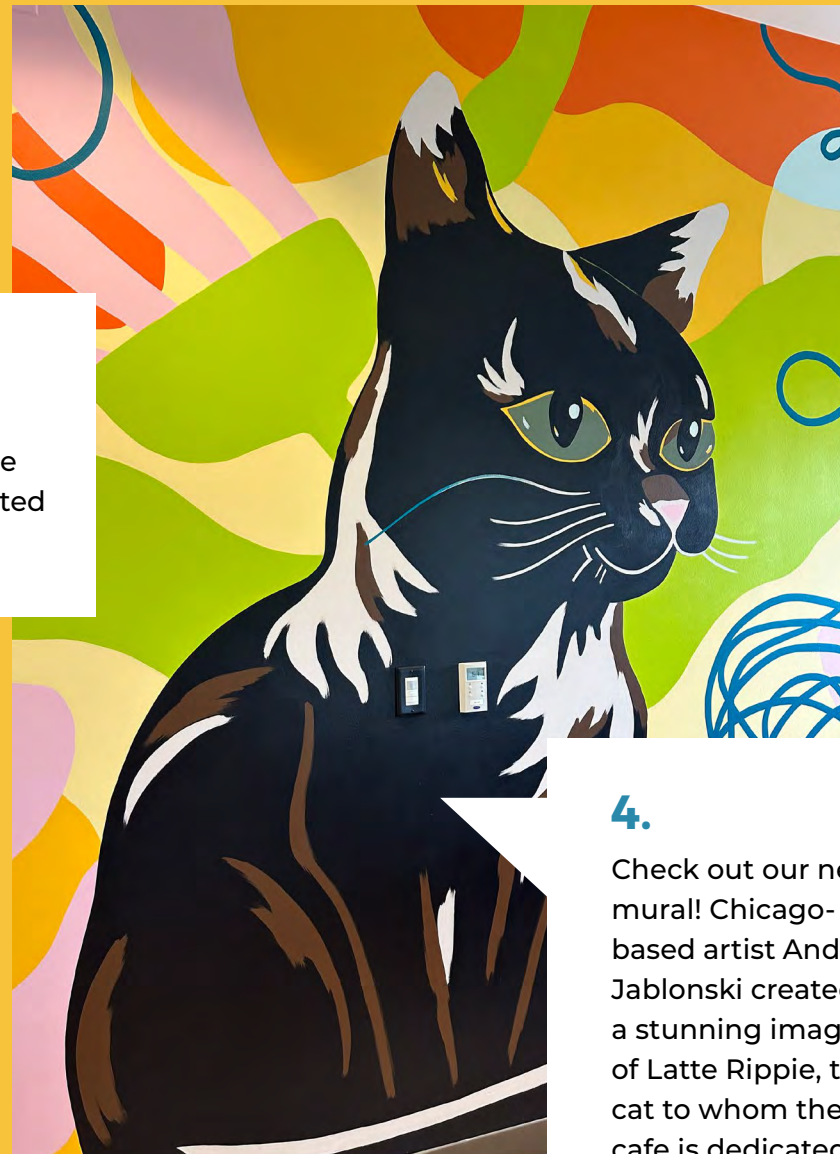
3.

WBEZ Chicago producer Justin Bull interviewed Community Programs Manager Cecilia for an episode of the podcast *The Rundown*. The interview highlighted our Cats at Work program and its life-saving impact!



4.

Check out our new mural! Chicago-based artist Andrea Jablonski created a stunning image of Latte Rippie, the cat to whom the cafe is dedicated.



2.

We hosted two events, Cat Walk in August and Catbaret in October, raising a combined total of more than \$104,000 for the cats and the people who love them!



5.

We hosted our final community vaccine pop-up of the year in our backyard, West Rogers Park. Thanks to our dedicated volunteers and staff, we were able to provide essential vaccines and microchips for dogs and cats and distributed a whopping 400 pounds of free pet food.



As we enter 2024, we are excited to continue our mission with even more exciting events, milestones, and memories made! Together, we thrive!



# 2023 INTERN PROGRAM

by Annie LeDuc

Thank you to everyone at Tree House for sharing your love for cats and unique talents with me. I have learned so much from every person here. Working with Tree House has been a joy and I hope to visit soon.  
Annie

Thank you to everyone at Tree House Humane Society for making my internship here absolutely wonderful. Thank you to the Cat Care Team, Clinic Team, Volunteers and the whole Tree House Staff for welcoming me and patiently teaching me. Everyone has been so kind to me, and I couldn't appreciate it more. I will remember all the love everyone has for every cat that comes in and everything you all have taught me.  
Wishing everyone the best,  
Jubilee T. (Animal Welfare Intern)

**For animal shelters in the midwest, summer is known as kitten season, when the team prepares for an influx of tiny creatures ready to grow and play. This year, Tree House welcomed a handful of equally eager and curious young minds in the form of interns. This offering of internship positions granted immersive career exploration opportunities for young professionals while enhancing Tree House's programs and furthering its mission.**

The 2023 Internship Program hosted experiences across the shelter and clinic with students from various educational backgrounds and career endeavors. Animal Welfare Interns Alyssa Caracheo and Jubilee Torres are undergraduate students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with aspirations of attending veterinary school. Over the course of 15 weeks, they encountered a 360-degree view of shelter operations under the supervision and mentorship of Jamie Gay, Senior Director of Operations at Tree House. "They learned the basics of caring for cats on the adoption floor, administering medications and weigh-ins, and providing enrichment to under-socialized cats," describes Gay. Alyssa and Jubilee's internship experiences often ventured beyond the shelter walls, assisting with Pop-Up Vaccine Clinics in Humboldt Park

and South Shore and supporting the Community Cats team during trap-neuter-release field days. The two wore many different hats throughout the summer by serving as Development Interns to aid in preparations for Cat Walk, Tree House's annual bar crawl.

Putting on the summertime fundraiser required support from the Marketing and Communications department, led by Senior Manager Katie Jordan and supported by intern Annie LeDuc. A senior advertising and public relations student at Loyola University Chicago, Annie created original content for social media and upheld the organization's communication strategy through various digital platforms. "She directly assisted with launching a TikTok account for Tree House, a key tool in our strategy to reach an untapped Gen Z audience," notes Jordan. Following her summer internship, Annie continues to support the marketing team by fulfilling current social media trends and Tree House event communications.

While students are counting down the days until winter break, Tree House looks forward to welcoming the next round of interns and learning experiences for all. "My hope for the program was a mutually beneficial relationship between the intern and manager, rich in development and learning opportunities, with a bit of fun along the way!" reflects Jordan. Much like their mission to build a world where every cat thrives, Tree House has created an internship program where any young professional can cultivate their unique passions and skills with the support of an experienced, compassionate team.

Tree House is seeking students and early-career professionals for their spring internship program in 2024. Internship positions will be available in Animal Welfare, Marketing, and Community Programs. Visit the Careers page on the Tree House website to learn more and apply.

**Tree House has created an internship program where any young professional can cultivate their unique passions and skills with the support of an experienced, compassionate team.**

...with  
sincere  
appreciation.

It's been a pleasure working alongside all of you this summer. I am truly grateful for the opportunity here at Tree House. Thank you for welcoming me with open arms, it has been a wonderful experience.  
- Alyssa Caracheo, Animal Welfare intern



# ADOPTION SPOTLIGHT: TEENY TINA

By Jasmine Zhang



*Meet Teeny Tina, a tiny fighter who never lost hope. At just four months old, she was surrendered by her owner to an animal hospital, unable to receive the medical care she needed. But little did she know, this was just the beginning of an incredible journey.*

In January, Teeny Tina arrived at Tree House, battling chronic constipation and bowel control issues. Despite her struggles, her love for food and treats never wavered. It was at Tree House that she finally received a diagnosis and a specialized care plan to manage her condition. Despite her health issues, Tina's spirit remained unbroken. She was sweet, loving, and ever-hopeful for affection. With her tiny paws reaching out for hugs and gentle strokes, she captured the hearts of all who met her.

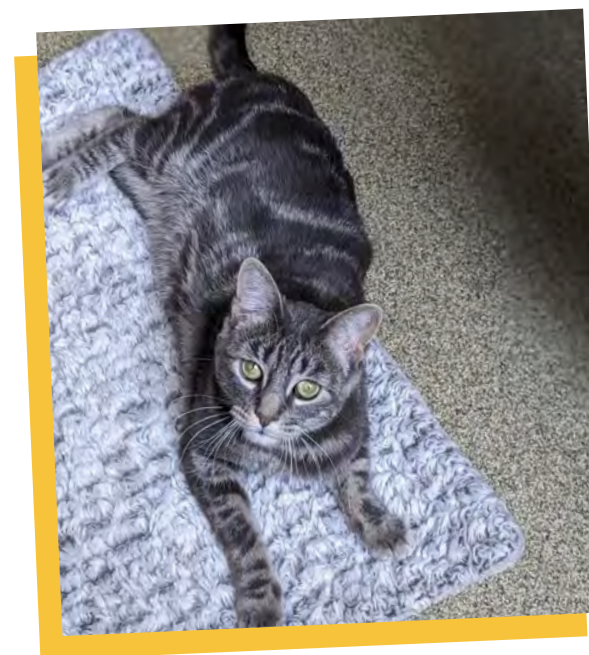
Sadly, due to her special needs, Teeny Tina was often overlooked by potential adopters, spending a long and sometimes lonely 18 months waiting for the right family. But she was never truly alone. The Tree House staff and volunteers showered her with love, treats, and playtime, ensuring that she felt cherished every day.

And then, one day, fate intervened. Amy, one of our amazing foster volunteers who was already caring for two special FeLV cats, couldn't help but be captivated by Teeny Tina. Although her heart was stolen, Amy knew she needed to fulfill her commitment to her current foster cats, so she patiently waited, counting the days, weeks, and months until the time was right.

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**Every day, her joy radiates through nudges and purrs that speak of a long-awaited happy ending.**

Finally, the day arrived when Amy could bring Teeny Tina into her loving home with the intention of making her a permanent part of the family. In Amy's cozy embrace, Tina found a world transformed. Every day, her joy radiates through nudges and purrs that speak of a long-awaited happy ending. Together, Amy and Teeny Tina have embarked on new adventures, with Teeny Tina even becoming harness-trained, ready to explore the world with her new family. It's a heartwarming tale that took nearly two years to unfold, but the wait was worth every second.





## TOUCHDOWN FOR TEAM TREE HOUSE!

Georges Azouri, former Tree House volunteer and current Events and Stadium Operations Associate with the Chicago Bears, was one of nearly 100 staff members to participate in My Cause My Cleats. The Chicago Bears partnered with Sneakerhead University, a local black-owned and woman-owned business in the heart of The Loop, to extend the My Cause My Cleats initiative to all members of the organization this year.

### What inspired the unique design of the Tree House shoes that you'll be wearing for My Cause My Cleats with the Chicago Bears?

My shoe design is inspired by the history and evolution of the Tree House logo. The shoes feature a Tree House logo and vibrant green for the Nike Swoosh and back heel. The rest of the shoe has a stylish black splatter that adds dimension and character. The logo and style were my greatest sources of inspiration, and I'm excited to see how the final product reflects them.

### How did your experience as a volunteer lead to your involvement with the Chicago Bears and My Cause My Cleats, and what motivated you to choose Tree House as your cause?

My time at Tree House introduced me to the world of hands-on work, which greatly influenced my current role in Events and Stadium Operations. Volunteering left a lasting impact on my personal development and led me to where I am now. The Chicago Bears now offer all their employees the opportunity to participate in the My Cause My Cleats initiative. We are one of the few teams in the NFL to do so. When I heard about this, I immediately thought of an organization close

to my heart. As a pet parent whose cats have received care at the Tree House Veterinary Wellness Center and a former volunteer, I'm excited to reconnect with this organization and shine a spotlight on them for this initiative.

### In what ways do you see this initiative fostering community engagement and support for both Tree House and the Chicago Bears?

I hope to see an increase in community involvement and even Chicago Bears staff members in working with Tree House. I would love to see more people become interested in Tree House and explore what they have to offer. We want this initiative to raise awareness for Tree House, hopefully resulting in more volunteers, donations, and adoptions.

### Are there any future plans or goals you have in mind for expanding the collaboration between My Cause My Cleats, the Chicago Bears, and Tree House?

This is the first year that we have expanded My Cause My Cleats to our staff so there are a few ideas I have in mind for the future. One idea is to create group volunteer opportunities for different organizations in our local area. This way, our staff can better understand the important work these organizations do. We could also expand the listing of organizations on our team website. This will make it easier for fans to find and support their favorite causes by directing them to the individual organization's websites. Sponsoring a cat on behalf of the Chicago Bears is something I have in mind here in the short term, and I hope to see more involvement in the future beyond just me!



## MEET TREE HOUSE: MATTHEW BENSON

by Katie Jordan

### Could you tell us about your background and how you became a Tree House Humane Society board member?

I work as a marketer in the pet food industry, doing everything from coming up with new product innovations to fostering brands' connections to their communities. I got to know Tree House better while working at Merrick Pet Care through volunteering opportunities such as building shelters for the Cats at Work program. When I learned about an opening on Tree House's Board, I jumped at the chance to get more involved with Tree House's vital mission.

### How does your work with Tree House Humane Society align with your personal values and goals?

I've had a lifelong love of cats, and I'm deeply familiar with the transformative power of the pet-parent and cat relationship. After navigating several health struggles with my own fur babies this past year, I also know all too well how challenging caring for a pet can be. To me, this reinforces the importance of Tree House's strategic focus on expanding access to care, and I'm honored to serve on the Board's Access to Care Committee.

### Growing up, did you have any pets you bonded with, and have they influenced the type of pet food products you developed?

I grew up on a farm, and my family adopted a barn cat, Mickey, who kept a wild streak in him all his days despite loving his new indoor life. More than anything, this taught me how closely a family can bond with a cat, even a cat that my mom nicknamed "Lick Lick



Bite" for his mood swings. When developing pet products, I try to honor the importance of this relationship. That gets reflected in everything from what type of recipes are crafted, to the quality of ingredients sourced, to the rigor of testing for quality and safety.

### What do you hope to achieve in your role as a board member in the coming years?

I've been thrilled to see the success of the Tree House Veterinary Wellness Center since its opening in 2021. As we look to the VWC's third year and beyond, I want to ensure we continue to provide the optimal mix of affordable, accessible, and sustainable care to meet our community's most pressing needs.





## — A BETTER OUTCOME FOR CATS IS WITHIN REACH —

By Marne Turner

*At Tree House Humane Society, our vision is to ensure every cat thrives. We achieve this not only through our physical shelter and clinic but also through educational programs and community outreach in our target neighborhoods.*

Taking our mission even further, we are proud to collaborate with the Vermilion County Department of Animal Regulation (VCDAR) in Danville, Illinois, as a mentor partner. This partnership is part of the Best Friends' Shelter Collaborative Program, which connects leading animal welfare shelters with those striving to save more animals. Through



Adoption Manager and Animal Control Officer Kathleen Orcutt, pictured with three puppies who received extra enrichment thanks to the grant program.

a yearlong grant program, we worked together to make a difference.

Tree House is teaming up with VCDAR to enhance their resources and practices. Through sharing best practices, training, and other strategies, VCDAR will be able to optimize their physical resources and achieve their goal of a 90% live release rate. With this multi-faceted approach, a better outcome for cats and dogs is within reach!

To make the most significant impact, there is a particular focus on decreasing the euthanasia rates for dogs due to behavior and cats due to illness. In pursuit of this goal, a wide range of effective measures are being put into action, big and small, to address factors contributing to these outcomes. Active solutions range from adding sound-dampening panels and white noise machines to reduce animal stress to reconfiguring room layouts and installing divider panels to improve disease control among the animal population. Furthermore, procedures and policies are also being evaluated for improvement, from intake, foster, and adoption to enrichment programming.

To date, there has been notable progress and impact on live outcomes and the morale of the staff and community that VCDAR serves. Jamie Gay, Senior Director of Operations at Tree House and steward of the relationship, shared, "Tree House is excited at the impact these changes are making for VCDAR's outcomes, and we are proud to be a shelter partner for this Best Friends Animal Network program."



Tree House is excited at the impact these changes are making for VCDAR's outcomes, and we are proud to be a shelter partner for this Best Friends Animal Network program."

JAMIE GAY

Senior Director of Operations at Tree House



Veterans at a rehabilitation center received convenient and compassionate care for their pets through a vaccine clinic held by Vermilion County Animal Shelter.



# — A LEGACY OF LOVE —

By Lee Clinton

**Tree House Humane Society is proud to take a moment to express our heartfelt gratitude and admiration for Glenn and Rachel Rippie.**

Their unwavering commitment and generous support to our organization since 2009 has had a profound and lasting impact on our mission to improve the lives of cats in need. Furthermore, the creation of a namesake fund in memory of their beloved feline companions, Mocha and Latte, has proven to be a testament to their profound love for animals and their dedication to making a meaningful difference within the cat community.

Glenn and Rachel Rippie's leadership gift this year honors their cherished cat Latte, and has been nothing short of transformative for Tree House Humane Society. Their extraordinary generosity has enabled us to embark on several

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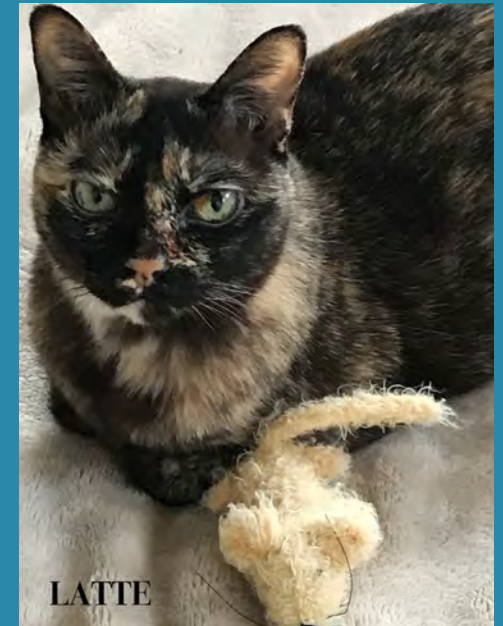
**Glenn and Rachel Rippie's leadership gift this year honors their cherished cat Latte, and has been nothing short of transformative for Tree House Humane Society.**

crucial initiatives, significantly enhancing our ability to provide necessities to the cats under our care.

The most significant impact of their contribution has been the acquisition of medical equipment. This cutting-edge technology will bolster our capacity to diagnose and treat sick and injured colony cats more effectively. By providing our dedicated veterinary staff with the tools and resources they need, the Rippies are directly contributing to improved patient care and a higher standard of medical treatment.

In addition to these essential improvements in medical and warming equipment, the Rippies' dedication to our cause is evident in other remarkable ways. One striking example is the creation of a beautiful mural in our Cat Cafe, featuring the beloved cat Latte. This mural not only serves as a touching tribute to their feline friend but also enhances the environment for our visitors, creating a more inviting and engaging space that promotes feline welfare.

Furthermore, the Rippies' generous support has significantly boosted our emergency funds. This reserve is invaluable in times



of unforeseen challenges and emergencies, ensuring that we can respond promptly and effectively to any situation that threatens the well-being of the cats we care for. The Rippies' contribution has empowered us to take swift action in times of need, safeguarding the welfare of our feline residents and enabling us to continue our life-saving work.

Glenn and Rachel Rippie's steadfast dedication to Tree House Humane Society and their compassionate support have made an immeasurable difference in the lives of countless cats. Their love for animals is the driving force behind our continued success in improving the lives of cats in need. We are profoundly grateful for their generosity and look forward to continuing making a meaningful difference in the world of feline welfare, thanks to supporters like the Rippies.

**The Rippies' contribution is a lifeline for these cats, as it guarantees that they are warm, cozy, and safe throughout the winter months.**



# COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN RESPONSE TO THE VETERINARIAN SHORTAGE

By Alexandrianna Heinemann



Pet healthcare services spending is expected to **increase 3-4% per year beyond inflation over the next 8-10 years.**



Up to **55,000 additional veterinarians** will be needed to meet the needs of companion animal healthcare in the U.S. by 2030.



Even with the new veterinary graduates expected over the next 10 years, **a shortage of up to 24,000 companion-animal veterinarians will likely still exist by 2030.**



It would take **more than 30 years of graduates to meet the 10-year industry need** for credentialed veterinary technicians.

Overwhelmed, overworked, and understaffed—this is the reality of workers in veterinary practices, animal hospitals, and shelters in 2023. A drastic shortage of veterinarians has fueled an industry-wide crisis, intensifying the strain on the escalating demand for animal care.

Projections indicate that by 2030, 55,000 extra veterinarians are required to meet this surging demand.<sup>1</sup> This demand has prompted existing veterinarians to extend their already strained capacities. Relief veterinarians are playing a pivotal role in temporarily filling the place of permanent staff members while serving as contractors for multiple animal hospitals.<sup>2</sup> Organizations such as Tree House rely on relief veterinarians to ensure their mission continues uninterrupted.

“In addition to the vet shortage, millions of animals didn’t receive spay/neuter during COVID when all ‘non-essential’ services were halted...,” said Tree House’s Shelter Medicine Manager, Cortney Moore. “The outcome of this has made it very difficult for the vet industry to keep up with the public demand.” Shelters like Tree House have responded to this crisis by offering low-cost spay and neuter programs as well as free pop-up vaccinations and microchip events in areas with limited access to veterinary care.

In the Chicagoland area, numerous organizations with shared missions foster relationships with one another, exemplified by the Chicagoland Humane Coalition.

Cultivating collaborations among these organizations facilitates resource-sharing and opens pathways for joint initiatives. By uniting locally, a collective effort can address the challenges the shortage poses and ensure the well-being of all animals.

1. <https://www.marsveterinary.com/tackling-the-veterinary-professional-shortage/>  
2. <https://indeverts.com/relief-veterinarian/#relief-veterinarian-101>

# MEET RELIEF VETERINARIAN: DR. ALYCIA BETH EISENSTEIN

By Alexandrianna Heinemann

**Can you tell us a little about your background in veterinary medicine and experience working with animal shelters or rescue organizations?**

I graduated from vet school in October 2000 and went into general practice for two years. Then, in December 2003, I opened my own veterinary clinic and sold it in December 2016. I’ve always had a passion for surgery, and I started relief work and volunteering doing spay and neuter in the Caribbean. My name got passed to a local shelter, and since 2017, I started focusing my work on high-volume, high-quality spay and neuter.

**In your experience working with Tree House, what have been some of the most rewarding moments for you as a relief vet and why?**

Working with an amazing staff that cares so much and has so much compassion for the community makes my life and my work easy. Recently, there was a cat with pyometra, a life-threatening uterine infection, and this cat would’ve been euthanized if it wasn’t for the Tree House staff. They intervened and prioritized a spay surgery for her, saving her life.



**Given the ongoing veterinary shortage, what can individuals and communities do to support their local animal welfare organizations and ensure pets receive the care they need?**

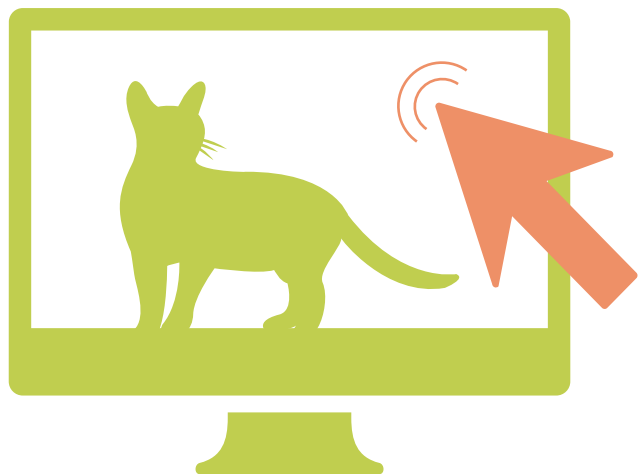
I think people getting their pets vaccinated, spayed, and neutered when they are under six months old will help with preventable diseases, such as parvovirus and panleukopenia. If females are spayed, it can help prevent pyometra, which can be quite costly. Prevention is the key.



# DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL

We are thrilled to announce we now provide accessibility and language support on our website through Recite Me! Our visitors can now customize their digital experience to meet their needs. The toolbar includes a variety of features, such as a screen reader, reading aids, fully customizable styling options, and a translation tool with over 100 languages.

Visit [treehouseanimals.org](https://treehouseanimals.org) to explore the support tool.



Check out our fresh new look! Explore our redesigned home page to learn more about our community impact and mission! Schedule an adoption appointment, get involved, donate, and more!

**22%** of US residents do not speak English as their first language

**26%** of adults in the United States live with a disability

**10.8%** of people with a disability have a cognition disability

**5.9%** of people with a disability are deaf or have serious difficulty hearing

**4.6%** of people with a disability have a vision disability

## AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVENTURE: FOSTER-TO-ADOPT CASSIUS

By Lee Clinton

It's hard to believe that Cassius, a charismatic and intelligent young cat, has been a resident of Tree House since February 2023. This bundle of feline enthusiasm is not just a ball of fur; he's a certified genius with a passion for interactive play and mental challenges.

Cassius thrives on the thrill of discovery, with the shelter being his personal playground. But Cassius is not just about play; he's a quick learner who has dazzled our staff and volunteers with his clicker training skills. This clever cat has mastered commands like "sit" and is currently excelling at learning to "stay."

Cassius seeks a family or individual through our foster-to-adopt program who shares his zest for life and is ready to provide the mental and physical stimulation he craves. His ideal home recognizes the unique needs of an intelligent and active cat like him.

An opportunity for adventure awaits with Cassius! With the support and guidance of our expert staff throughout the foster-to-adopt period, you can feel confident in making Cassius a permanent part of your home.

**This bundle of feline enthusiasm is not just a ball of fur; he's a certified genius with a passion for interactive play and mental challenges.**







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