

SUMMER 2025



TREE HOUSE
HUMANE SOCIETY

THE CATalyst

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SETTING THE PACE

THE CATalyst

Tree House Humane Society Magazine
Summer 2025

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VISION: Every Cat Thrives

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



@TreeHouseHumaneSociety



@TreeHouseCats



@tree-house-humane-society

Follow Tree House Humane Society on LinkedIn
to see how we're leading innovative, life-saving
work for cats and communities—plus get
updates, impact stories, and career opportunities.

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends of Tree House,

This year, Tree House set the pace—bold in our
actions, clear in our purpose, and unafraid to lead
with heart.

You'll see that spirit in every story in this issue—
stories like that of to Nelson and Bartholomew,
whose final chapters were written with dignity
and love. You'll meet our incredible award winners,
each one proving that innovation and compassion
aren't opposites—they're partners. You'll also see
how our community came together at The Field
Museum, not just to admire the journey from wild
predator to house cat, but to celebrate the human
hearts that make that transformation possible.

This past year, we made meaningful strides—
refining how we care for cats, expanding access
to services, and finding new ways to connect with
our community. The work wasn't always easy, but
it was grounded in purpose, guided by values, and
driven by the belief that progress is possible, even
in imperfect conditions. We supported thousands
of cats and their families, deepened partnerships,
and kept evolving to meet the moment with
empathy and action.

But none of this happens without you.

You are the reason cats like Cassius find homes,
the reason our Veterinary Wellness Center can
offer care to families in need, and the reason
Tree House can dream bigger. When you donate,
volunteer, foster, or advocate, you're part of
something real—something rooted in empathy,
powered by community, and aimed at creating a
more compassionate world.



And through it all, we remember what one of
our board members, Ann, said to me not long
ago: "Lean into joy." It stuck with me. Because
even in the tough moments, joy is what grounds
us—joy for these incredible cats, for the people
who love them, and for the connections that
remind us why this work matters. That joy
keeps us going. And it keeps us bold.

As we look to what's next, I hope you'll keep
leaning in with us. Keep showing up. Keep
believing that love and care, even in chaos, can
change lives.

**Tree House is what it is—bold,
loving, and forward-looking—
because of you. Thank you.**

Grateful for you,

Raissa Allaire, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

INNOVATION IN ACTION



Jamie Gay, Senior Director of Operations at Tree House, steps into her new role as co-chair of the Chicagoland Humane Coalition, advancing collaboration and innovation in animal welfare across the region.



Photos by Darris Lee Harris

Tree House, the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine, and partners hosted a one-day, mobile spay/neuter clinic in Chicago's Medical District—delivering innovative, on-site care to 58 cats and 20 dogs.



Watch
the news
segment



Brian Rivera, Tree House's Director of Technology and Administration, recently spoke at two leading animal welfare conferences, Animal Care Expo and the Prairie States Conference, sharing how tech and AI can power innovation and efficiency in animal welfare.

Values *in Action*

At our February all-staff town hall, we launched **Values in Action**—an internal campaign that brings Tree House's core values to life. The event kicked off our first value: **innovation**, driving Tree House to grow and improve, one smart idea at a time.



At the Best Friends Advocacy Summit and Animal Care Expo, Executive Director Raissa Allaire highlighted how collaboration, despite differing approaches, drives innovation and impact in animal welfare across Chicagoland and beyond.



We welcomed Julie Gelfand, Northwestern University Kellogg Board Fellow and MBA candidate, to the Tree House Board of Directors. With a strong consulting background and a passion for community-driven innovation, Julie brings a fresh perspective and strategic leadership to help strengthen our impact.



Photos by Sachi Straus

Our spring Kitten Shower brought the Tree House community together to support the tiniest lives in our care, raise funds for essential supplies, inspire new foster families, and showcase innovative, hands-on ways to help kittens thrive from the very start.

CELEBRATING
INNOVATION AND
TEAMWORK:

ANNUAL TREE HOUSE AWARDS

By Annie LeDuc

We are proud to showcase the talents and contributions of Tree House staff teams. Nominated by their colleagues, these honorees have gone above and beyond to model innovation and uplift our community of caregivers.

ROOKIE OF THE YEAR: **Michelle Nolan**

Michelle joined Tree House in 2022, serving as a cat care volunteer for nearly two years before joining our staff as a cat care technician. From the beginning, her enthusiastic, warm, and brilliant personality made a clear impact on our cats and people. “Michelle learned the ropes of caregiving quickly and brought innovative ideas to our team, friendliness to everyone in the building, and a willingness to jump in to support the team,” praises her nominator. Thanks to Michelle’s presence and initiative, the adoption floor storage cabinets now boast an efficient organization system, while the cat colonies are filled with her infectious laughter.



BIG BANG AWARD FOR INNOVATION: **Shelter Staff**

The Shelter Staff crew is one of the mightiest at Tree House, both in size and impact. From caretakers to adoption counselors and more, shelter staff interact with dozens of cats and people each day, and they know how to make every moment count. “Creating the daily cat health and behavior observation trackers, plus implementing open adoption walk-ins, were huge innovation moments for cat care and customer service staff. These processes, and many more, led to better matches, thriving cats, and happy adopters,” boasts their nominator. In a true team effort, shelter staff prioritize collaboration and welcome fresh perspectives to improve service for our cats and community.



RIPPLE EFFECT AWARD: **Community Programs Staff**

Through every season, Community Programs staff show up in neighborhoods across Chicagoland with pop-up clinics, education events, pet food pantry supplies, and hands-on shelter builds. Their steadfast pursuit of growth has brought programs and resources to hundreds of pet owners and caretakers. “By creating opportunities for meaningful partnerships, enriching lives through education, and expanding our reach, Community Programs have set the stage for future growth and positive change at Tree House,” says their nominator. Their commitment to forging new relationships and expanding our reach inspires a culture of innovation across Tree House.



DARE TO TRY AWARD: **Event Staff (Marketing, Administration, and Development)**

Composed of team members from marketing, administration, and development, Event Staff set out to revamp Tree House’s event strategy with the debut of City Kitty Soirée. While it did not meet every expectation, their fearlessness, innovative problem-solving, and commitment to the challenge earned them the Dare to Try Award. “(For City Kitty Soiree), our Event Staff tried a new venue and format, executed the event well, and adapted as needed throughout the process. Most importantly, they demonstrated what a high-functioning team looks like – supporting each other, staying solutions-focused, and maintaining a shared commitment to success,” praises their nominator.



SERVICE LEADER AWARD: **Samantha Alspaugh**

Samantha found her way back to Tree House after several years, returning with outstanding leadership and project management expertise to support hundreds of fosters at Tree House. “Sam has gone above and beyond to educate and empower our community of foster caregivers through her informative tutorials on neonate care, medication administration, and individualized support to each foster volunteer has built confidence and a sense of community,” remarks her nominator. Sam’s enthusiasm for learning and stewardship informs her innovative service to both our foster volunteers and the cats in their care.



We are inspired by these remarkable individuals and teams for their innovative spirit. Congratulations to our Annual Tree House Award recipients!

HOME IS WORTH THE WAIT: CASSIUS'S JOURNEY TO BELONGING

By Lexie Heinemann



At Tree House, we believe every cat deserves the chance to grow, thrive, and find a home where they are truly seen, nurtured, and supported.

For Cassius, a spirited and often misunderstood cat who spent over two years in our care, this opportunity to be seen for who he truly is—and to finally find a loving home—made all the difference.

Cassius arrived at Tree House from Chicago Animal Care and Control in February 2023 with little known about his past. However, it quickly became clear that he was full of energy and needed a thoughtful, individualized approach to help him adjust to his new surroundings. He struggled with social boundaries and would

often become overstimulated during human interactions, requiring regular and engaging playtime to redirect his abundant energy in appropriate ways. Although Cassius was adopted early on, he was soon returned when it became evident that his unique needs required more time and experience to understand.

Though his return was disheartening, it allowed us to refine the work we had begun. With the expertise of our feline behaviorist, Erin Mayes, Cassius blossomed. Our devoted staff and volunteers established a consistent routine that included providing enrichment activities, hosting one-on-one play sessions, and setting clear boundaries. This process helped Cassius build trust, become more confident in expressing himself, and develop healthier behaviors. Gradually, the once unpredictable cat began to reveal his affectionate nature.

By November 2024, Cassius had settled into a new foster home, where the calm, supportive, and well-structured environment helped him feel increasingly at ease. Over time, his foster family came to truly appreciate his personality and everything that made him who he is. As their connection deepened, it became clear that Cassius had found more than just a temporary place to decompress and channel his liveliness. In March 2025, they officially adopted him, fully embracing his quirks and offering the patience and love he needed to thrive.

Cassius's story is a powerful reminder that every cat follows its own unique path, and sometimes it takes a little longer for the right match to come along. Cassius is deeply loved and living a full, joyful, and exuberant life—a testament to the power of second (and even third) chances and the unwavering belief in the value of every cat.



Cassius's story reminds us that the right family is always worth the wait—but we're hoping Korra doesn't have to wait as long.

Korra came to Tree House nearly a year ago from Chicago Animal Care and Control. At nine years old, she's a senior cat with a strong sense of self. Affectionate on her terms, she'll nuzzle in when she's ready—and retreat when she's not.

Korra may not be the classic cuddler, but that's what makes her special. She knows what she likes, and she's still open to love and growth.

She's not just looking for a home—she's looking for someone who sees her fully and loves her for exactly who she is.

Could that be you? See Korra's profile at treehouseanimals.org or visit the shelter during adoption hours to meet her.

ROAD TO RESCUE: NEXT STOP, HOME!

By Hana Rafee



Hi there!
My name is Boromir.



I'm a one-year-old tabby, named after the noble warrior from The Lord of the Rings. Just like the Fellowship, I embarked on a brave journey—not to destroy a ring but to help save lives! My adventure took me from sunny southern Florida all the way to the Windy City of Chicago! The mission? To rescue cats like me from overcrowded shelters and bring us to a place where loving adopters are waiting.

STOP 1: Palm Beach County, Florida

Lacey and Jason—our amazing human drivers from Furry Friends Transport—prepped the big red school bus with cozy kennels for the trip. They'd already picked up some fellow feline travelers from Truly All Cats Rescue. We were all ready to roll!



STOP 2: Naples, Florida

Next stop: Collier County Domestic Animal Services, my home shelter! This is where I hopped on board. With every seat filled and tails tucked in, we set off on our 1,300-mile journey to Chicago. It would take nearly 20 hours, but I planned to snooze through most of it.

STOP 3: Orlando, Florida

We passed by Mickey Mouse's house and waved our whiskers at all our favorite movie stars. Our road trip inspiration? *Homeward Bound*, that 1993 classic about a brave kitty and her canine brothers finding their way home. Sound familiar?

STOP 4: Nashville, Tennessee

In the Country Meow-sic Capital of the World, we tuned into the honky-tonk vibes on the legendary Honky Tonk Highway. We were halfway to our new lives and feeling hopeful.

STOP 5: Indianapolis

Though we were early for the Indy 500, the sight of the speedway reminded us that we're racing toward our happy endings!

STOP 6: Chicago Skyway

Crossing the Chicago Skyway, we caught our first glimpse of the skyline. I sniffed the cool breeze off Lake Michigan and knew we were almost there!

STOP 7: Tree House Humane Society

At last, we arrived at Tree House Humane Society in North Chicago. Friendly faces greeted us as Lacey and Jason helped us settle in. Our road trip was over, but a new chapter was just beginning.

After a week of playing and purring with my new shelter buddies, a kind man came to meet me. The adoption counselors said it was a perfect match, and they were right. That same day, I went home with my new dad. Now, I nap in sunny windows, chase toy mice, and get all the chin scratches I want. Life couldn't be better.



MEET TEAM TREE HOUSE: DANIELLE GANTOS

Member of Tree House’s Board of Directors

by Annie LeDuc

Before joining the Board of Directors this year, Danielle was already a familiar face at Tree House. For nearly 10 years, she’s volunteered at events, including Lights of Love, Catbaret, and City Kitty Soirée, greeting guests with a smile and embodying the mission of Tree House while sporting her iconic cat ears. We’re thrilled to welcome Danielle to the Board of Directors in the next chapter of her long-standing relationship with Team Tree House.

What brought you to volunteering at Tree House?

I was introduced to Tree House through their spring adoption events several years ago. As I got to know more about the organization and its people, Tree House’s mission and approachability resonated with me. I began volunteering for events and joined the External Affairs Committee in support of the Board [in 2019]. I loved my experience as a volunteer and being able to share with others the great work we do at Tree House, the shelter, the Veterinary Wellness Center, and in the community.

How do you plan to lend your expertise to the Board, and what do you hope to see Tree House accomplish in the next year?

I hope to bring my 15+ years of marketing and management experience to help the Board continue to grow Tree House’s impact in the Chicagoland area by promoting their events and community initiatives. Through strategic action and creating engaging events that help animals and their caretakers, we can amplify the well-being of everyone in the community.

What is your favorite part about your cats?

I’ve had cats all my life, and I love that every one of them has a unique personality. From sassy and vocal to snuggle and sweet, each cat has their habits, quirks, and moods. It’s been my privilege to get to know each of them and be part of their family. My life is made indescribably better by all the cats around me.

Tree House’s Board of Directors is certainly made better with Danielle, and we are grateful to have her expertise as we continue to expand our mission of caring for our cats and community. Welcome, Danielle!

Looking to make a deeper impact with Tree House?

We’re welcoming a few dedicated supporters to get involved through our board committees. If you’re passionate about our mission and curious to learn more, email us at development@treehouseanimals.org. We’d love to hear from you—spaces are limited!



THE HEART OF TREE HOUSE: POWERED BY VALUES

By: Lee Clinton

At Tree House Humane Society, our values aren’t just words on a page, they’re the heartbeat of everything we do. That’s why we’re thrilled to introduce *Values in Action*, a new communication and engagement initiative for #TeamTreeHouse designed to celebrate, practice, and live out the five guiding principles that define our work: Innovation, Teamwork, Respect, Excellence, and Compassion.

Values in Action is a vibrant reflection of Tree House’s commitment to transparency, inclusivity, and mission alignment. It’s not just about reminding ourselves of our values; it’s about recognizing how every action we take brings them to life.

“Living our values helps us grow stronger together,” says Raissa Allaire, Executive Director. “They guide how we care for our community, our animals, and each other. *Values in Action* gives us new, meaningful ways to stay connected and intentional.”

Why Values Matter

When we center our values, we create space for deeper trust, clearer communication, and greater impact. As Paul Legac, Board Vice President and

Secretary, shares, “Celebrating our values helps us understand the ‘why’ behind our work. It reminds us that each decision, each conversation, each contribution matters.”

Program Highlights

Values in Action includes several exciting elements:

VALUES CAMPAIGN: Compelling stories and staff highlights bring each value to life, inspiring connection throughout the team.

TOWN HALLS: Quarterly meetings focus on a single value, featuring team-building activities.

VALUE-DRIVEN TRAINING: Monthly leadership sessions apply a value through real scenarios.

TEAM TOUCHPOINTS: TV screens display team highlights, and custom buttons let staff wear their values proudly.

Looking Ahead

Our hope is simple: that *Values in Action* inspires each of us to reflect, recognize, and engage more deeply with what makes Tree House unique, not just in what we do, but in how we do it. This is a celebration of who we are, together.



Photo by Darris Lee Harris

THE LOVE THAT LETS GO: HONORING NELSON AND BARTHOLOMEW

By Samantha Alspaugh

BARTHOLOMEW



Nelson and Bartholomew couldn't have been more different. Nelson arrived the day after Christmas—plump, confident, and clearly used to home life. Bartholomew came a month later, ragged and cautious, shaped by the streets. But despite their contrasting paths, they shared one powerful truth: both were deeply, unconditionally loved by their Tree House family. And when the time came to say goodbye, each was met with that same love—held gently, cared for tenderly, and given peace in their final moments.

Bartholomew spent his early days pretending to sleep in the back of his acclimation cage, too scared to explore. Once he finally braved the first step out for a squeeze treat, the change was instant—he purred, head-booped everything in reach, charming everyone with his soulful eyes and earnest desire for scratches. Though he spent periods of time on our adoption floor, Bartholomew spent most of his time in foster care. His journey included tumor removal, hernia repair, spinal issues, severe allergies, partial paralysis, diabetes, and eventually, an aggressive cancer. Despite his long list of ailments, Bartholomew's heart-melting sweetness never wavered. With his big, human-like eyes, he let us know he felt safe and loved. When the time came to help him pass peacefully, he left this world with the same

NELSON



quiet grace he brought to every day—and left a lasting imprint on all who cared for him.

Nelson found his way to our Foster Program to work through allergy issues, and though his skin was itchy and raw, every photo of him shared was the very image of a cat living his best life. Returning to our adoption floor a month later, his love of lap time made him a favorite among staff and volunteers. Sitting with Nelson was a grounding experience, thanks both to his size and peaceful nature. Months later, Nelson was sadly diagnosed with very advanced heart disease. Bathed in soft sun and given every comfort—fresh laps of water, warm places to rest—Nelson spent his last months wrapped in love, until the time came to say goodbye.

Their final chapters were written with the same compassion that defined their lives at Tree House. When it became clear that continued treatment would only prolong suffering, we made the difficult but loving decision to say goodbye. Humane euthanasia, while heartbreaking, is an essential part of our work. It's not about giving up—it's about giving peace.



After a decade in animal welfare, saying goodbye hasn't gotten easier for me. Even now, just writing about these two boys still brings tears to my eyes. Even so, dignity in death is part of what it means to provide truly compassionate care. It's the final gift we can offer to animals who gave so much of themselves while with us. Through our Veterinary Wellness Center, our support extends beyond the animals in our shelter, offering compassionate care services to pet owners and caregivers in the community. We ensure every cat thrives, right up to the end, even when it means letting go.

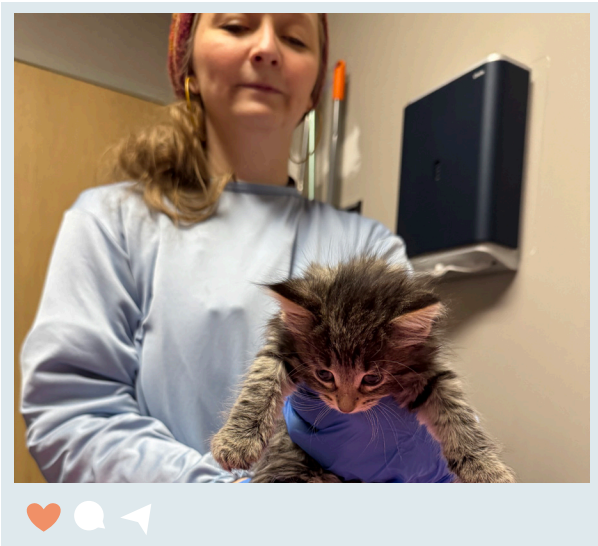
Nelson and Bartholomew gave us comfort, laughter, and affection, and when the time came, we returned that same compassion, trust, and love as we said goodbye. We are grateful to have known them, and we honor their memory by continuing to offer every cat the dignity they deserve.

If you're navigating the difficult decision of end-of-life care for your beloved pet, our Veterinary Wellness Center is here to offer compassionate support. Please contact our Client Service Coordinators for more information.

**clientcare@treehouseanimals.org
872-302-4671**

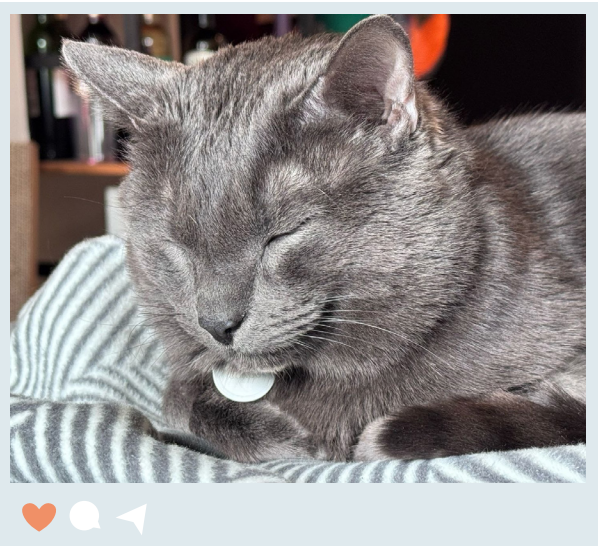
≡ SOCIAL MEDIA HITS ≡

From dramatic rescues to joyful adoptions (and one unexpected opossum!), these stories had our followers clicking, commenting, and cheering on #TreeHouseCats.



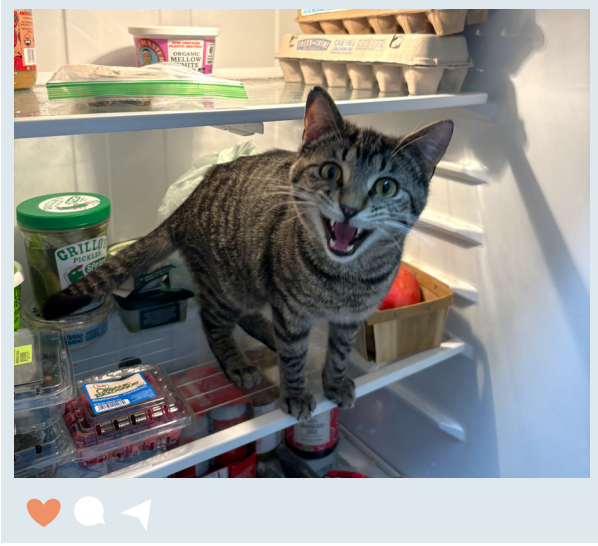
#ChicagoPubs

These Chicago pub kittens stole plenty of hearts online, and now they've all been adopted! From O'Donovan to Mrs. Murphy, this litter had locals saying, "If you know, you know."



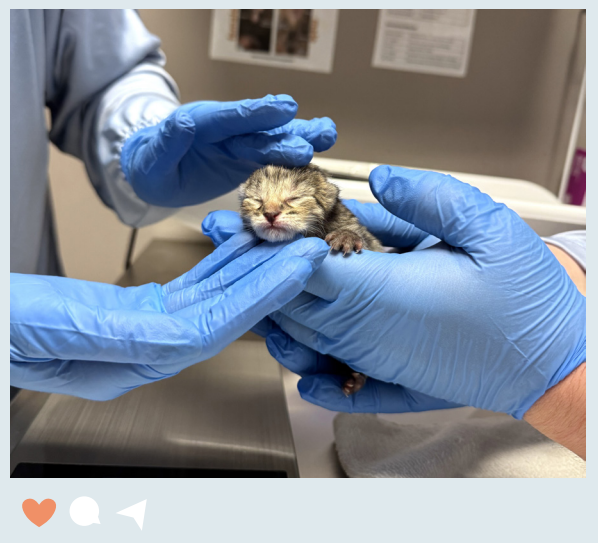
#FormerTomCat

From street life to sofa life—Bongo has been adopted! Thanks to quick care and community support, this former tomcat is now living his best life indoors.



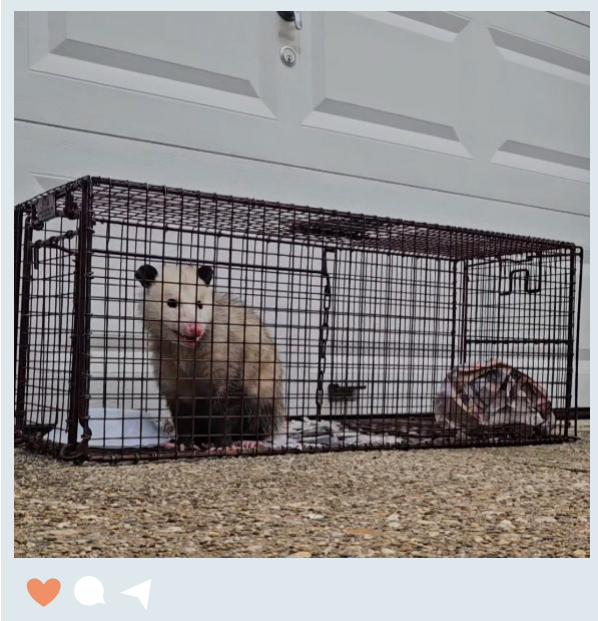
#NewHere?

Charlie Brown may be new to indoor life, but he's already obsessed! From the fridge to the dishwasher, every discovery is an adventure.



#YemayasLegacy

Yemaya surprised us with five kittens overnight—though she's no longer here, her legacy lives on through her healthy babies, now thriving in foster care and surrounded by the love she would have wanted for them.



#WildSurprise

Ope... not the cat we planned to catch this morning! Instead, we accidentally trapped a curious opossum. Don't worry—once we lifted the door, this sweet visitor scurried right back out!



#CatCountConfessions

How many cats does Team Tree House have? The answers might surprise you, and maybe inspire a few new adoptions!



#AgainstAllOdds

When we met Sisko, he had a deep neck wound and an injured forelimb, but still greeted us with purrs and belly rolls. We knew he deserved a chance. After weeks of healing in foster care, they made it official: Sisko has found what he fought so hard for.



#HappyTrain

Red Line, Pink Line, and Green Line took their meds, and let's just say, they're definitely working!! Next stop: spay procedures. Final destination? The adoption floor!



OUR EXHIBIT OF GRATITUDE: A DONOR APPRECIATION EVENT AT THE FIELD MUSEUM

By Tim Graham



Earlier this year, Tree House Humane Society celebrated our generous donors with a magical night at the museum.

Tree House hosted some of Chicago's most dedicated cat lovers with a private, after-hours tour of Cats: Predators to Pets, a limited-time exhibition at The Field Museum.

Some of us admired the strikingly lifelike taxidermied big cats, frozen mid-pounce or caught in dramatic motion. Most of us were captivated by candid videos of wild cats honing their instincts—stalking, tumbling, and sparring with siblings. And many of us lingered at the exhibits tracing the evolution of the domestic cat, from fierce solitary hunters to beloved companions curled up in our homes. All of us, however, came together over a warm cocktail

hour—engaged in meaningful conversation with Tree House staff, board members, volunteers, and most importantly, the guests of honor: our incredible Tree House donors.

While the cats were on display, a spotlight was shown on the generosity and devotion of our transformational donors and partners in impact. Our donors enable and energize Tree House to take center stage, to move boldly and dream big. Impactful programs like the Veterinary Wellness Center and the Cat Café for special cats with feline leukemia were made possible thanks to the generous support of those who attended the event.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to all our donors, who are an incredible part of the Tree House community working to ensure every cat thrives.

Photography by Darris Lee Harris





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