



**Steve heads to the solarium from his suite via an easy-access transport tube.**

## The *Purr*pose of Life

In honor of one cat, Tabby's Place saves many

BY NANCY PETERSON

**Stray cat Tabby showed up at** Jonathan Rosenberg's door in 1984, and decided to stay. He lived a long life, despite being FIV-positive—but of course, his life wasn't long enough for Rosenberg and his wife Sharon. They were heartbroken when 16-year-old Tabby was diagnosed with squamous cell carcinoma in April 1999 and had to be euthanized.

The loss affected Rosenberg deeply. He'd gotten in on the ground floor as a computer scientist with an Internet startup and loved it, but after calculating that his stock options would allow him not to work, he resigned from his job. In 1999, he began working on permitting, engineering and construction issues to turn a cornfield in Ringoes, N.J., into a

cage-free sanctuary for cats, now known as Tabby's Place.

"We thought that sounded informal ... that would be the kind of cat he was. He would stop at a bar or something," Rosenberg says.

The organization can accommodate about 100 cats. Up to 15 live in the lobby, and a few are in the offices, community room and lounge, but most of them live in suites. There's suite A, unofficially for shy cats; suite B for normal, healthy cats; the Golden Girls suite for seniors; and a suite for cats who are FIV-positive. All but one provide access to a private outdoor enclosure through clear custom-crafted Plexiglas tubes running overhead in the hallway.

Tabby's Place has taken cats as young as an hour and as old as 20 years. Most cats come from shelters where they were likely to be euthanized. Shelters contact Tabby's Place, which notifies them when space becomes available, and the shelters decide which cat or cats to send. Some crowded shelters with short holding periods send healthy young cats because they think they'll get adopted quickly. Other shelters send special-needs cats—diabetics, paraplegics, epileptics—because they know they'll get the medical care they need.

Tabby's Place also helps community cats, both ferals and strays, and has conducted trap-neuter-return projects in the

past, including working for the past two years with Lambertville Animal Welfare (LAW) in New Jersey, to provide community cats with spay/neuter and medical attention. LAW co-founder Lori Stagnitto says that the county and her group are fortunate to have such great help.

Rosenberg serves as the executive director of the organization, and has help from 12 full- and part-time staff and 160 volunteers. There's also development director Angela Townsend, who came to Tabby's Place in 2007 and planned to work there for a year while she figured out what to do with her life. After college and seminary, she spent a year as a youth pastor and loved it, but felt something was missing.

"Little did I know that God had a cat sanctuary and not a church sanctuary in mind," Townsend says.

Townsend also serves as staff writer and community liaison, and handles donor and public relations. She's at her desk most of the day, but breaks away to take photos and get details about the animals to promote them on her blog. She knows every cat's name, age, history and personality quirks.

Although Tabby's can't take cats from all the individuals who call for assistance, it has an extensive network of helpers and often provides referrals. The sanctuary does take some cats from Good Samaritans—cats like Morgan, whose rear legs were paralyzed and who had other serious health issues. His prognosis at the time was dire, but that was more than a year and a half ago. (He apparently "didn't get the memo" that he has serious heart disease, Townsend jokes.)

Of the 1,350 cats who have called Tabby's Place home, all but a few hundred have been adopted. Many of them are cats who would likely have struggled to find homes, animals like Tashi, who's paraplegic, and Gabriella, who has cerebellar hypoplasia. Both went home with the Weidner family from Horsham, Pa., in 2011; the family has since adopted another cat, who has spina bifida.

Those cats who aren't adopted have a home for life—and those whose adoptions don't work out can always come back. "Once a Tabby's Place cat, always a Tabby's Place cat," says Townsend. ■



**Tabby's Place is a cozy haven for cats of all stripes. Former shelter cats Chrissy and Scooter (far left) chill out with feral kitties Gorgonzola, Valencia and Dobro.**

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