

Tree House Cats at Work Project

For the cats -- for the community

Humane, Effective, Long-term Solutions

The Tree House Cats at Work Project is a “green” humane program that removes sterilized and vaccinated feral cats from life-threatening situations and relocates them to new territories where their presence will help control the rodent population. The cats are humanely managed by volunteer caretakers for the entirety of their lives with ongoing support from Tree House as mandated by Cook County’s “Managed Care of Feral Cats Ordinance”. Rodents are repelled by the cats’ presence and leave the cats’ new “territory”. Many cats will also hunt and catch rodents on occasion, but if they are fed regularly, they usually won’t eat them. Compared to the methods that are most commonly used to control rats, which are short-term solutions and therefore ineffective, and also dangerous to kids, pets and the environment, this method proves to be effective, humane, and environmentally friendly. It is a win-win situation for the cats and their human neighbors!



Tree House Community Cats Program

Although many Tree House volunteers had informally been practicing Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) for many years, the Community Cats/TNR Program was formalized in 2005 and now sponsors over 250 managed cat colonies, made up of more than 2,000 free-roaming or “community cats” in Cook County. The Tree House Low-cost Spay/Neuter Clinic sterilizes and vaccinates more than 4,000 animals each year - most of which are free-roaming cats.

Proven Success

The Cats at Work Project is an outgrowth of the Tree House Community Cats TNR Program. Since its inception in 2005, nearly 75 Tree House “working cats” have been successfully placed in several private city and suburban backyards, dozens of barns, and even a factory. All of our “clients” have reported an almost immediate end to their rodent problem within a week of welcoming their cats. In addition to the rodent control benefits, what we love to hear most are the stories of the wonderful relationship that people form with these amazing, resilient cats.

How it Works

The Cats at Work program is the only hope for displaced, feral community cats to be placed in safe, secure locations for the rest of their lives! First, a member of our Community Cats Team will come to your property to help you determine the best place for the cats to be acclimated. All cats are acclimated in confinement at their location for 3 - 4 weeks. This can be in a shed, garage, or basement, or many people choose to retrofit their porches to make a private “cats’ den”. No matter where you choose to acclimate the cats, most of the time they will need to start off in a large dog crate in that area to ensure they do not escape. Our Team Member will help you make that determination during the site visit. You’ll also discuss the placement of their housing, feeding station and outdoor litter areas which the new caretaker is responsible for providing. When you are ready, a TNR Team member will bring the cats and help you get them settled. During this time period, the cats become accustomed to the sights, sounds, and smells of their new environment. It is important that the caretakers talk to the cats daily during acclimation and feed them extra-tasty meals to make them feel welcome and eager to stay around after their release. We recommend that the cats be “meal-fed” both canned and dry food every day, or an all-canned diet if you prefer. We do not recommend a “dry-food-only” diet for outdoor community cats. A check-in phone call will be scheduled at the 3-week-mark to determine if the cats are ready to come out or if they need another week of confinement. When the cats are released from their cages, they stay in their new home territory, and the new guardians make a commitment to care for the cats for the rest of their lives. For the average Chicago back yard, we suggest relocating a group of at least 3 – 4 cats together, but there is a minimum of two cats per site. If you already manage a cat colony, you can add more cats individually. The placement fees per cat are as follows: \$50 (1 or 2) \$45 (3) \$40 (4 or more). You must sign a placement contract and Cook County Colony Caretaker application at the time of the site visit.

Testimonial

“Killing two birds with one stone is usually an unpleasant phrase, but in our case, the end result speaks to a creative and sustainable solution to an age-old urban problem. Choosing not to use chemicals to combat a rodent problem at our manufacturing facility, we embraced the concept of giving the job to two rescue cats who were homeless. We built them a home within our factory, trained them to feel safe in and protective of their new home, and in about 6 weeks, they were productive members of the Skolnik team – doing their job effectively. The result is that we are rodent free, and we have the benefit of having two “anti-tension” felines on staff, in their new home. We are grateful to Tree House for overseeing this entire program from inception to identifying the feline participants, approving the design of the home, managing the initial training , and continuing to care about King and Prince to this day. Thank you, Jenny and Maureen and the entire Tree House TNR Team.”

Howard Z. Skolnik, President/CEO – Skolnik Industries, Inc.

Get Started

If you are interested in learning more about relocating feral cats to your property, please contact our Community Cats Hotline at: 773-784-5488 ext. 234 or tnr@treehouseanimals.org. Our Community Cats hotline is staffed by volunteers, and requests are addressed in the order they are received. Please allow up to 48 hours for a response.

About Tree House Humane Society

Tree House is a cageless, no kill, humane organization that specializes in the rescue and rehabilitation of sick, injured, and abandoned stray cats. We rescue nearly 1,000 cats annually. Since our founding in 1971, we have adopted out more than 16,000 cats and have provided low-cost or free spay/neuter and vaccine services for more than 20,000 cats and dogs. We have helped countless other animals and their human guardians through our various programs including our Community Cats (TNR) Program, Animal-Assisted Therapy, Behavior Hotline, Educational Outreach Program, Pet Loss Grief Support, and Pet Food Pantry which helps low-income individuals keeping pets and their guardians together. Generous support from kind individuals and charitable foundations allow us to continue to rescue and rehabilitate some of the most vulnerable animals and work toward creating a No Kill Chicago and Nation! To learn more about Tree House, or to find out how you can help, visit us at: TreeHouseAnimals.org.