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A feline's best friend:

Egg Harbor Township woman's
mission is rescuing stray cats

EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP - Her brother gave her a kitten when she was 6 years old, and she thought it was the greatest thing in the world.

She still thinks so. Today she cares for more than 50 cats and kittens that reside in a barn next to her home.

Peggy Sterling, 48, is the founder of LICK, or Life Improvement for Cats and Kittens, a non-profit cat rescue and adoption organization.

Sterling started saving strays in 1989 when she lived in Philadelphia. She'd found a cat on 22nd and Walnut that had been run over by a car and took it to her vet to be euthanized. When she went back to pay the bill, the cat was still alive and the vet was sure she could save him.

"Walnut", as she named him, has two pins in his hip and a pelvis that healed on its own and still lives with Sterling today.

She says she likes cats because they are intelligent and have individual personalities, adding that "there's something very mystical about them. They're like furry little angles."

Sterling has been married to her husband, Larry, owner of Great American Graphics, for 14 years. She graduated from Stockton in 1978 with a degree in literature and a teaching certificate in English.

She says she migrated from teaching to marketing and sales, which she has been doing for the last 20 years. She currently works for Cobalt Group, a Web site company for the automotive industry, as a service consultant for Volkswagen and Audi.

Sterling's barn has a sign on the wall that says "Cats are like potato chips ... You can't have just one!"

Kittens are kept in two large cages, and the adult cats have the run of the place. A mother cat lying in a kitty igloo nurses her three 3-day-old kittens.

Another feline sits atop a huge catfish pillow. Several large kitty litter pans line the wall, along with bowls of food and water. An air conditioner and a ceiling fan keep the premises comfortable.

Sterling names many of the cats after the places where they were rescued. For example, there's Fender, found near a Somers Point auto body shop; Pappoose, from Navajo Avenue; and Ivana, found under the boardwalk in front of Trump Plaza. There's also Nicholas, who showed up on Christmas Day.



Staff photo by Vernon Ogrodnek

Peggy Sterling checks on some of the more than 50 cats she cares for at her home in Egg Harbor Township. She is founder of LICK, or Life Improvement for Cats and Kittens, a non-profit cat rescue and adoption organization.

Sterling has a few volunteers who help around the shelters, but says she basically funds it by herself, holding bake sales and craft fairs. Her 85-year-old mother makes catnip pillows for her to sell.

Since her shelter is presently filled to capacity, she's unable to accept strays until more adoptions take place. However, she is actively involved in a program called Trap-Neuter-Release. Sterling will trap cats for people, take them to the Humane Society (offering funding assistance for shots, spaying, neutering), and return the cat with the agreement that the people will provide food and shelter.

"I have a problem with putting something to sleep just because it won't sit on your lap," Sterling says.

Why is she so passionate about cats?

"I think God has lists, and you're on one list or another and you have a passion for that," she says. "If we all had a passion for the same thing, a lot of things wouldn't get done.

Want to help?

To contact Peggy Sterling, call 609-653-9004, or see her Web site at:

www.catsandkittens.org

Volunteers and donations are welcome. On the wish list are: any brand of dry cat food, kitten food (preferably Iams), Oil-Dri cat litter from Sam's Club, 13-gallon trash bags, paper towels, bleach and disinfectants.

So we have to respect each other's passions. Somebody's got to work on raising funds for leukemia, somebody's got to champion the cause of elder rights. Other people have to rescue critters, and I'm on that list. And I think if we all work together, then everything in society will get done."

