



Shopkeepers of the furry kind

Feline greeters bring joy to customers

By JAYNE HANSON
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A handful of furry, four-legged friends happened to join a few businesses in town — but it wasn't part of the plan.

In most cases, the businesses owner's took pity or fell in love with the felines. Since, they wouldn't have it any other way.

ACE AND HARDWARE

Diane Cooper, shift manager at Ace Hardware Northside, said the story dates back to when she started work 15 years ago.

"(Ace) just arrived with her litter of kittens and we let her stay," Cooper said. "And we found her hiding out in the backyard. She had given birth to a litter of kittens. That was 15 years ago."

The kittens went to the local shelter, but Ace soon was pregnant again. After her second litter, staff found homes for all but one of the kittens. The remaining one was added to the family, and named Hardware.

Ron Webb, an employee for 16 years at Ace Hardware Northside, takes care of the duo with regular veterinarian visits. But they live at the business.

The cats sleep mostly in the lunchroom and usually are only aroused when they know when employees have chicken or tuna for their lunch or snack.

"Then they come out and beg," Cooper said. "They are part of the family."

The cats have customers who regularly turn up at the business to see them. A youngster even drew a picture of the shop cats and hand-delivered it to the store. It hangs on the office door, Cooper said.

Ace is the one that interacts with customers more so than Hardware. Especially at Christmas time Ace likes to hide under the snow of the store's holiday displays.

PETER AND MARY

Dorita and Scott Bare, owners of Dorita's Place, have two feline business mascots — Peter and Mary.

Scott Bare shared the story with Today's News-Herald of how the cats climbed to that status.

"We've had them at least four years," Bare said. "We were working with humane society about putting up something in our store to promote cat adoptions."

Two four-month-old kittens, Peter and Mary, were

brought in.

"Halloween came around and Dorita fell in love with them and adopted them," he said.

Today, Mary tends to linger at the store's check-out counter and is sometimes referred to as the "catshier" instead of a cashier.

Peter prefers to sit within a small crate above the store's crate display, which he has made his

SKITTLES AND FIONA

Wayne LeGrand, store manager at Havasu Hardware, said he's not much of a cat guy but the species is beginning to grow on him.

"Skittles was the first cat," LeGrand said. "It was the week of thanksgiving three years ago, it was really cold. I'm not a cat person but I let her inside."

Now the cat is an indoor/outdoor cat and is she roams the downtown neighborhood,

"Everyone know who she is," LeGrand said. "She comes and goes as she wants but stays in doors at night."

Skittles is known to enjoy the attention from customers by staying pretty close to the register. Customers respond to her in a positive way, even enough to video her and post her on YouTube

"She loves the attention," LeGrand said. "She loves to get pet ... it just happened that way. We didn't even want one. I'm not really a cat person but this one has grown on me."

The second cat, a family cat named Fiona, is a bit more of a recluse and customers who catch a glimpse should consider themselves lucky.

OZZIE AND WASI

Manager Karen Lowry said the first shop cat, Wasi, was adopted from the local animal shelter in 2006. The cat's name, Wasi, is the abbreviation for Western Alarm Services Inc.

"We wanted a shop cat to keep the dispatchers company on weekends at night," Lowry said. "Ozzie was a stray who showed up at our back door three years ago."

Customers sometimes stop in just to see the two felines.

"At Christmastime, people will bring in cookies for us and the cats get treats," she said.

You may contact the reporter at jhanson@havasunews.com.



Wasi waits for a Fax at Western Alarm Systems.

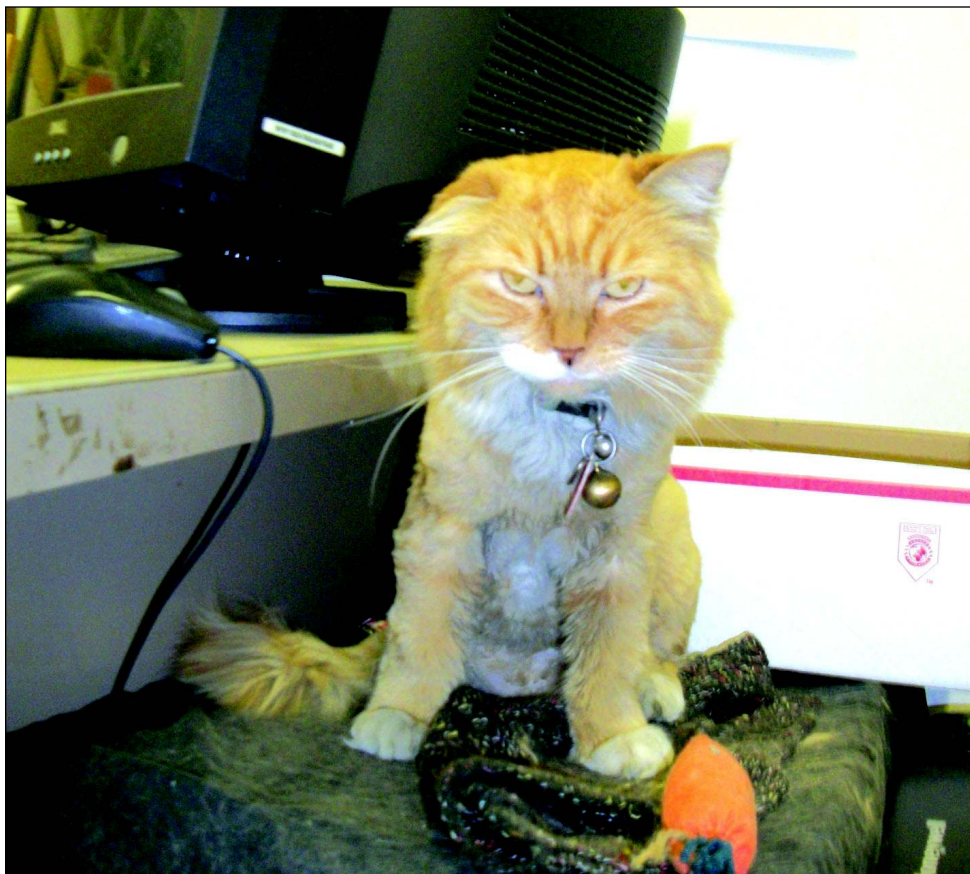
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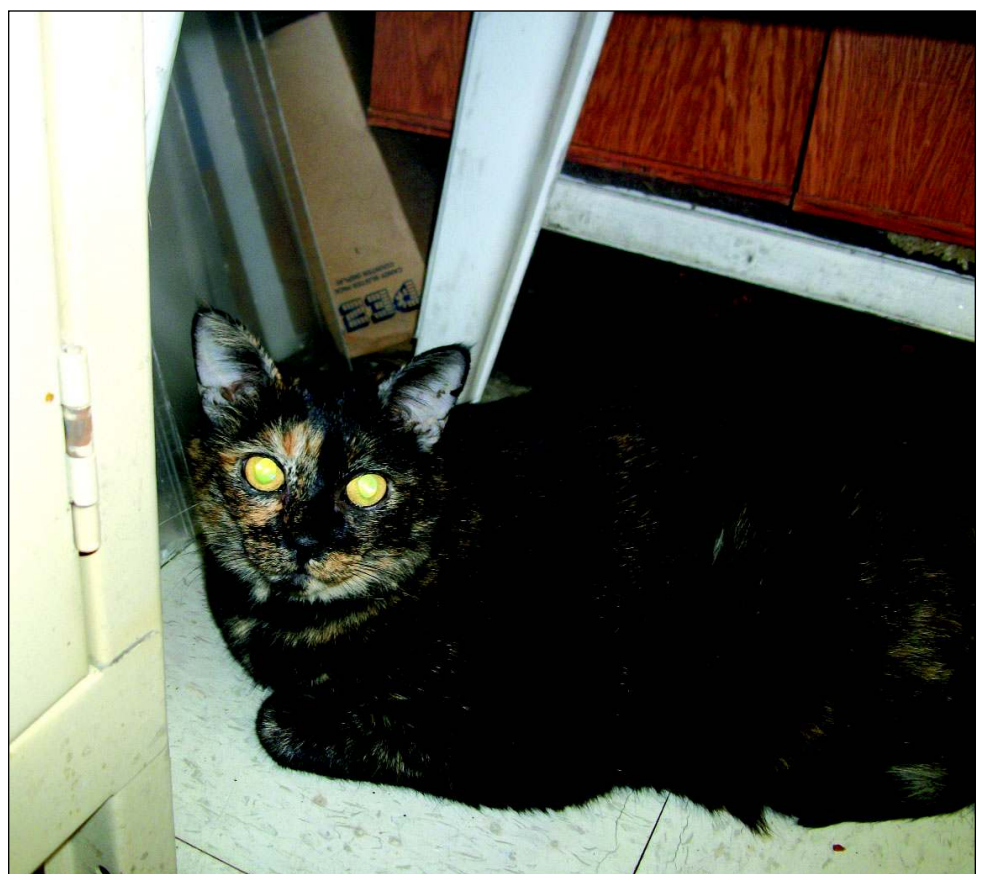
Hardware takes a break at Ace Hardware Northside.



Mary offers service with a smile at Dorita's Place.



Skittles plays coy with a "mouse" at Havasu Hardware.



Ace takes care of business at Ace Hardware Northside.