

A Friend in Need

CAT FANCY Editor Susan Logan blogs about her visit to North Shore Animal League America.

By Susan Logan

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After a red-eye flight from Los Angeles, I got to visit the Nursery and hold this little kitten, who perked me up. I desperately needed a fur fix when I landed at JFK International Airport after a sleep-deprived, red-eye flight from Los Angeles. I was thankful my first appointment in New York was with the North Shore Animal League America, the world's largest no-kill shelter. Not only was the staff gracious and friendly, it was a privilege to get a full tour of their extraordinary facilities.

The first stop on the tour was Vice President of Planned Giving Barbara G. Barrett's favorite room — the Nursery. This room was filled with kennels that had litters of pre-weaned and newly weaned kittens, and they were adorable. Veterinary Technician Jen Waldt, in charge of that room, was a protective mother hen, insisting we sanitize our hands after touching, holding or playing with each litter. I got to hold one of the kittens, who eventually climbed onto my shoulder. You can imagine how I wanted to take her home. Other kittens swung from the tops of their cages and stuck their paws through to bat at us. I could have spent the day in this room alone.

The next stop was the dog kennel, in which every dog looked eager for adoption. It's a heartbreaking thing to see, but as Senior Vice President of Operations Joanne Yohannan said, "They're all safe here." A no-kill shelter can say that.

After being held for a couple of minutes, the black cat relaxed in my arms. Next it was the adult cat room and this broke my heart even further, because I figured many of these cats once were someone's pet and for whatever reason — economic hardship, the death of an elderly pet parent or illness — these cats were relinquished. One big black cat in particular moved me to hold her. After a couple minutes she relaxed and became dead weight in my arms. It was hard for me to put her back in her kennel, but Yohannan assured me that these cats get held by volunteers who are primarily there for that reason.

The next facility on the property was called the Cat Habitat, in which the cats could freely walk around, climb cat trees and look out of windows. The cats who have been at the shelter for a while take turns and are rotated from the kennels into this cageless house. Here, cats can walk up to people as they desire.

As if I weren't already impressed, the next facility was a large building that housed mostly empty kennels which are available to take in animals affected by emergencies such as Hurricane Katrina. NSALA has seven rescue trucks that go into areas affected by natural disasters to rescue these animals and bring them to this facility.

Cats can climb trees in the Cat Habitat. A feline fashion show at the Algonquin Hotel to honor Matilda the Cat's 14th birthday raised \$4,000 for NSALA, which operates solely from private donations. Supermodel Beth Stern, spokesperson for NSALA who emceed the event, raised \$300,000 for the organization by running the New York Marathon. CAT FANCY columnist Sandy Robins and I felt honored to be invited to this event by Matilda's Executive Assistant Alice de Almeida and to be sponsored by American Airlines to fly out to make these new friends for a good cause.