

Inside the Meezer Express

Siamese rescue network is likened to an Underground Railroad for cats.

By Brad Kollus

A Siamese cat waits to begin her journey on the Meezer Express. The Meezer Express, a program of the Siamese Cat Rescue Center in Locust Dale, Va., works to save homeless Siamese cats. Meezer is a nickname for Siamese.

Why Only Siamese Cats?

Siamese are surrendered by their owners second to any other purebred cat, often because the breed tends to be vocal and requires a lot of attention — characteristics that not all owners are prepared for. Thus, there is a large need for loving homes for Siamese cats.

The Siamese Cat Rescue Center places photos of Siamese cats up for adoption on their website and in a newsletter, looking for people to adopt them. Often, someone wants to adopt a cat that lives hundreds of miles away. This is where the Meezer Express comes in. It is made up of volunteers that take the cats by car from one driver to the next across the country until the cat reaches its new home.

“When we put cats up for adoption; for example, someone in Virginia may adopt a cat that is in Ohio. So, we offer a group of volunteers who run similar to an Underground Railroad,” Roy Hendl, the program’s coordinator says. “They’ll drive a portion of the trip and then hand a cat off to the next driver, and then hand it off to the next driver until it gets to its adopter.”

A Meezer Express driver prepares to transport a Siamese cat to a new home. On the Road

The Meezer Express consists of a network of about 450 drivers and has transported and saved the lives of 3,750 cats since its inception 10 years ago, Hendl says. “We cover all of the East Coast, and we also cover Ohio, Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, Indiana, West Virginia and Pennsylvania” Hendl says. He adds that the organization is “constantly looking for new drivers,” especially in Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

Drivers are required to have clean driving records, carry cell phones and be non-smokers. The volunteers usually meet at places along the highway like fast food restaurants or hotels. The average leg of a drive is between one and a half to two hours. The average total trip is eight hours. During their journeys, cats travel in carriers with litter pans and towels.

All this coordination is made easier by a sophisticated computer program developed by Darrell Zwemke, vice president of the Siamese Cat Rescue Center. The program calculates miles, times and routes for the drivers. This system makes sure the program runs efficiently and effectively, and that the cats get to their new, loving homes.

Drivers Make the Difference

Rising gas prices have put a strain on the program, but not the commitment of the drivers. “We surveyed our drivers, and they absolutely say that they would not let the gas prices affect them,” said Siri Zwemke, director of the Siamese Cat Rescue Center.

“People who do volunteer give up a lot of their personal time and a lot of their financial resources to do this, and it is very appreciated by the organization and the cats. It’s really a fun thing to do, and it’s very worthwhile,” Hendl says.