

Kitten Kindergarten Teaches Cats Tricks

The classes at the Houston SPCA help socialize kittens and cats.

Posted: July 31, 2008 2 a.m. EDT

Tex, an orange-and-white tabby kitten, watched the spoonful of canned food carefully as Kitten Kindergarten instructor Dulce Garcia told him to "sit." His haunches came close to the ground, but not quite all the way. Then Tex was distracted by a ball batted in his direction, and he ran off, not sitting and not getting the canned food treat, the Houston Chronicle reports.

"Cats don't have the best attention spans," Garcia said. "But you can train any cat. You just have to find out what motivates them."

Tex is motivated by canned cat food, and he has made progress in the Kitten Kindergarten classes. A stray up for adoption, he responds to Garcia's "touch" command, tapping his nose against her thumb in exchange for a taste of canned food. Other students in the class have learned to fetch, sit and heel.

"There's somewhat of an urban myth out there that you can't train cats," said Elise Gouge, manager of animal behavior and training for the Houston SPCA. "Cats just need a little more convincing that it's in their best interest."

The SPCA's Kitten Kindergarten classes, designed for cats between 8 and 16 weeks of age, have the goal of socializing the young cats, making them more comfortable interacting with people and other pets, Garcia said. The classes are held once a week for three weeks. Cost for kittens adopted from the SPCA is \$35; the price increases to \$50 for kittens adopted elsewhere. Call 713-869-SPCA, ext. 187, for class schedules.