

California Cat Shelter Struggles to Stay Open

Financial woes could displace more than 200 cats from Atascadero sanctuary.

By Soraya Gutierrez

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Scarlett, a formerly feral cat, was rescued by the North County Humane Society. Efforts are underway to prevent the closure of a no-kill cat sanctuary based in San Luis Obispo County, Calif. A budget shortfall caused by shrinking donations to the North County Humane Society cat shelter in Atascadero, Calif., could displace more than 200 felines.

The shelter operates on \$300,000 annually, with most of the funds coming from individual donations. Kayce Daniels, director of animal care, says the 31-year-old shelter has enough money in reserves to keep going for five months.

"It is a sign of the times right now," Daniels says. "We're probably in the same boat as a lot of nonprofit organizations, not just in our county, but across the United States."

A cat waits for adoption at the North County Humane Society. The shelter has a volunteer base of 200, as well as a small paid staff that provides medical care for the cats. More than 3,000 felines from the sanctuary have been placed in homes during the past 10 years, including the relocation of rescued kittens from Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Daniels says.

With the rising cost of fuel affecting how people spend their money, Daniels says, many pet owners are turning their animals in. The number of cats that enter the sanctuary continues to rise.

The shelter recently sent more than 7,000 letters to community members asking for donations. The goal is to raise \$300,000.

Despite the shelter's financial woes, Daniels says she remains optimistic about staying open. "We take pride in what we do," she says. "We do it because we love the animals."

For more information, visit the North County Humane Society's website or call 805-466-5403.