

Cats at Work Program **For the cats -- for the community**

Humane, Effective, Long-term Solutions

The Tree House Cats at Work Program is a “green” humane solution that removes sterilized and vaccinated feral cats from life-threatening situations and relocates them to new territories where their presence will help control the rodent population. Caretakers humanely manage the cats for the entirety of their lives with ongoing support from Tree House, as mandated by Cook County’s “2007 *Managed Care of Feral Cats Ordinance*.” The cats’ presence alone repels rodents, causing them to leave the cats’ new territory. Cats will also hunt and catch rodents on occasion, but when they are fed regularly (as mandated by the program), they usually won’t eat them.



Fig. 1 Working cat with his prey



Fig. 2 Rat hole under fencing

Why Other Methods Don’t Work

Common methods used to control rats, such as poison, gassing and traps are ineffective short-term solutions. Garbage and dog feces represent a continuous food supply for rats. Assuring that lids are on the cans only does so much because rats commonly chew holes right through the plastic. When rats are killed, their burrows are quickly taken over with new rats, a phenomenon called the “vacuum effect.” Rat poison is also dangerous to children, pets and the environment. Working cats are natural predators, which provide a reliable, permanent solution and a win-win for both humans and cats!

Proven Success

The Cats at Work program is part of Tree House’s Community Cats department. Since its inception, over 800 Tree House “working cats” have been placed successfully in private city and suburban backyards, dozens of barns, and at condo buildings, factories, warehouses, and breweries. Our clients report an immediate impact on the rodent population and a near end to their rodent problem within a few weeks of welcoming their cats. In addition to the rodent control benefits, what we love to hear most are the stories of the wonderful relationship that people form with these amazing, resilient cats.

How it Works

Cats at Work is the only hope for many displaced, feral community cats to be placed in safe, secure locations for the rest of their lives! First, a member of our Community Cats Team comes to your property to help you determine the best place for the cats to acclimate, as well as a good place to locate well-insulated, yet lightweight and portable winter shelters. All cats are acclimated in confinement at their location for 3 weeks. Acclimation can be in a backyard, shed, garage or basement. Many people choose to retrofit a space under their porch or deck to make a private “cats’ den.” No matter where you acclimate the cats, most of the time cats will need to start off in large dog crates in that area to ensure they do not escape. A Community Cats Team member will help you make that determination during the site visit.



Fig. 3 A Working Cat in her acclimation crate with shelters and litter box

You’ll also discuss the placement of their housing, feeding station and outdoor litter areas which new caretakers are responsible for providing. When you are ready, a member of the Community Cats Team will bring the cats and help you get them settled. During this time period, the cats become accustomed to the sights, sounds, and smells of their new environment. It is important that the caretakers talk to the cats daily during acclimation and feed them extra-tasty meals to make them feel welcome and eager to stay around after their release. We recommend “meal-

feeding” both canned and dry food every day, or an all-canned diet if you prefer. We do not recommend a “dry-food-only” diet for outdoor community cats, as wet food is far more nutritious, helps with hydration, and is also more desirable to most cats.

The Tree House Community Cats team is available to support you during the acclimation phase and beyond. We are available for check-ins throughout the acclimation process to make sure your cats are comfortable, healthy, and ready to be released. When you release the cats from their acclimation crates, it is not uncommon that they disappear for several days to a couple weeks while they explore their new surroundings. Keep feeding on schedule!

Cats stay in their new home territory because they are fed regularly and have shelter. New guardians make a commitment to care for the cats for the rest of their lives. For the average Chicago back yard, we suggest relocating a group of at least 3 cats. Cats are social creatures and naturally live in colonies. A single cat may very well seek out the nearest colony where there is a better “cat social life.”

As required in Cook County, Colony Caretakers need to sign an application to register as a Colony Caretaker. Your name and address are strictly confidential. Tree House only reports to Cook County on the number of colonies and number of cats.

Testimonials

“Killing two birds with one stone is usually an unpleasant phrase, but in our case, the end result speaks to a creative and sustainable solution to an age-old urban problem. Choosing not to use chemicals to combat a rodent problem at our manufacturing facility, we embraced the concept of giving the job to two rescue cats who were homeless. We built them a home within our factory, trained them to feel safe in and protective of their new home, and in about 6 weeks, they were productive members of the Skolnik team – doing their job effectively. The result is that we are rodent free, and we have the benefit of having two “anti-tension” felines on staff, in their new home. We are grateful to Tree House for overseeing this entire program from inception to identifying the feline participants, approving the design of the home, managing the initial training, and continuing to care about King and Prince to this day.”

Howard Z. Skolnik, President/CEO – Skolnik Industries, Inc.

Getting Started

If you are interested in learning more about relocating feral cats to your property, please contact: 773-262-4000, info@treehouseanimals.org or caw@treehouseanimals.org.