

SHOULD YOU KEEP YOUR CAT INDOORS?

30 Celebrating
YEARS

Cat Care for the Responsible Owner

CANADA \$3.25 JULY 1995 \$2.95

CAT FANCY

CC000111

**PRACTICAL
TIPS** Make Your Home
Cat Friendly

BE PREPARED
Learn Feline
First Aid

PLUS ▶ How Owners Indulge Finicky Cats
▶ The Water-Loving Turkish Van



Serving Animals

By Susan Easterly

Bertha's House

Far right: Some cats have special needs and are permanent residents of Bertha's House. Stevie, for example, is blind.

Right and below: Home to more than 100 cats, Bertha's House features a specially designed, enclosed yard complete with a pond.



The house tucked under blue skies and eucalyptus trees in Laguna Beach, California, might first be mistaken for someone's comfortable home. A closer look, however, reveals a specially designed yard, a pond, lots of cozy baskets, resting benches, scratching posts and cat toys. A perfect sanctuary—for cats.

In fact, this nontraditional home for more than 100 cats is the result of one woman's long-standing dream. For many years, Bertha Yergat ran a cat-boarding facility in the area and adopted many abandoned cats. The elderly woman worried about what would happen to her cats when she was gone, so she began to make plans to establish a permanent shelter. She called it the Blue Bell, in memory of one of her favorite cats. Today the place is simply called Bertha's House. It is supported by the Blue Bell Foundation for Cats, a nonprofit organization funded by donations and a small endowment left by Bertha, who died in 1989 at the age of 80. "This is a lady who had a vision for her cats and was able to make it come true," says Susan Hamil, a Blue Bell Foundation board member.

Indeed, Bertha envisioned a foundation that would continue to protect and care for her own cats, and future needy cats, with love, kindness and respect. This was her way of fulfilling her life's commitment to cats—a commitment recognizing that all living things have worth, states information provided by the foundation. "Bertha had the backbone and wherewithal to

put it together," Hamil says. "So we try to fulfill her dream and make it work."

Work is exactly what it took to carry on Bertha's dream of providing a safe, nontraditional haven for cats. For example, although many Blue Bell cats are adoptable, some of the cats living at the facility have special needs or are not sociable, so they would not make suitable pets. These cats, along with those whose previous owners have endowed them for a lifetime of care, are here to stay.

Best of all, surely from the cats' perspective, is the lack of individual cages. All Blue Bell cats enjoy the run of both house and yard, which is surrounded by protective fencing around and above them. It is not unusual to find more than 100 cats loose together in the house. Not surprisingly, that presents some unique situations with nutrition, sanitation and flea control, says Hamil, whose husband, John A. Hamil, D.V.M., was Bertha's veterinarian for nearly 15 years. "We have been very successful," she adds. "We want to share what we've learned with other people who have multicat situations."

Today, Bertha's House is fully licensed and inspected by Laguna Beach Animal Control. Every cat is vaccinated, spayed or neutered, microchipped and collared with a Blue Bell tag that includes the cat's name. Each cat receives premium-quality cat food, veterinary care and individual doses of love and attention. New cats are tested for feline leukemia; any cat leaving

Bertha's House via adoption is also tested. Perhaps most amazing, given the flea-friendly atmosphere of Southern California, is that Bertha's House has been flea-free for more than a year.

The day-to-day work is accomplished through the efforts of three full-time employees the organization proudly calls its cat care specialists. Kay Cox, chief administrator, oversees daily operations as a volunteer. A health care coordinator and a part-time volunteer who administers daily medications report to the foundation's board of directors. Caretakers on the two-acre property handle the balance of the 24-hour supervision.

The cats get along well, and fighting is rare, Hamil notes. Perhaps, as the foundation information suggests, the cats seem to know that Bertha's House is a good place to be. Included in the mix of happy residents are several disabled cats with special health needs, such as Stevie, who was born blind, and Tommy, who has only three legs but doesn't seem to realize he is different.

Several singular programs round out the foundation's work. For example, local qualified senior citizens are encouraged to adopt cats through the foundation's unusual foster care program. If necessary, the program will accept a cat back into Bertha's House without hesitation, thus alleviating the fear many seniors have that their pets may outlive their ability to care for the animals.

The process of adopting a cat from Bertha's House is also unique. Adoptions are available on a limited basis, and approximately 25 cats are adopted each year. (Bertha, an admittedly feisty character, believed few people were good enough to own

cats, Hamil recalls.) The group prefers that all family members come to Bertha's House and visit with the cat they want to adopt. Potential owners are asked to fill out a comprehensive application form and pay an adoption fee, and a waiting period is required before the selected cat can be taken home. Adopting an adult cat is a big decision that should not be made impulsively, Hamil emphasizes. "We want pet owners to really think about the commitment being given to a cat, for richer or poorer, in illness and in health," she says.

People who cannot adopt a cat can choose to help care for one permanently living at the sanctuary through the sponsorship program. Frequent visits are encouraged to create a bond between sponsors and their Blue Bell cats. For those who simply like to be around cats, the foundation offers a volunteer program "whereby your affection is put to good use."

Kay Cox believes Bertha's deep bond with her cats still endures. The Laguna Beach firestorm that destroyed 300 homes in October 1993 raged up the Laguna Canyon where Bertha's House is located. The cats were evacuated, and the fire came within 50 feet of the west side of the Blue Bell

facility. Firefighters worked through the night to make a firebreak before the fire reached the tall eucalyptus trees and steep hills surrounding Bertha's House. "We envisioned Bertha with her arms around Blue Bell, protecting it," Cox says. "It did not burn."

One of the many benefits of KMR.

Here's 9 more:

Quality: Four of the highest quality protein sources available today — skim milk, whey, casein, and egg yolk.

Performance: Easily digestible for high protein efficiency ratio (P.E.R.).

Performance: Taurine added for healthy heart and eyes.

Performance: Filtered for best, with minerals in soluble form for optimal skeletal development.

Performance: Balanced fats and oils for energy and healthy skin and coat.

Easy to use: Ready-to-feed liquid. Powdered packets. Use or freeze within 3 days of opening.

Consistency: Every batch produced and tested with food-grade ingredients.

Help: An experienced PetCare nutritionist will answer any technical or usage questions you have about KMR. Call 1-800-557-5782.

Proven: Kitten and owners have relied on the nutritional benefits of KMR for over 20 years. For more information, call 1-800-557-5782.



The world's best selling kitten milk replacer.

Earn free product through the KMR Breeders Club! Call for more information. 1-800-557-5782

For more information about Bertha's House, contact the Blue Bell Foundation for Cats, Dept. CF, 20982 Laguna Canyon Road, Laguna Beach, CA 92651; (714) 494-1586.