

DAVID BAUMAN/The Press-Enterprise

Hettie Perry's cats gather around for a feeding in the Cattery.

Woman's devotion to cats leaves little time to pause

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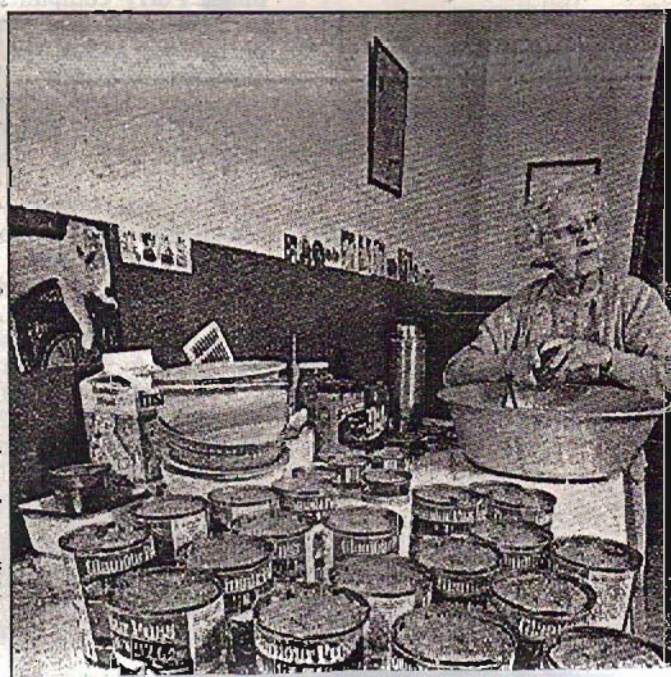
Hettie Perry and her 180 or so charges live on a winding street of large lots and big trees off Limonite Avenue in Pedley. Horses travel 63rd Street, where she lives, as often as cars and skateboarders do, bringing barking neighborhood dogs to the front yards.

Perry's three dogs run freely in the front and back yards. Ex-

cept for Perry, the rest of the family stays indoors all the time. Three of them, cats crippled by cars, by falls or since birth, live with Perry in her single-story house in the front of the property.

The other 170 share what she calls "The Cattery," a new building of about 10 rooms built especially for the cats she takes in, feeds, medicates and loves.

For the past 22 years, the last. (See CATS, Page B-3)



Cats . . .

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18 months in Pedley, Perry has cared for cats other people don't want. It's as much a service to humans as it is to cats, she said. And it's all done with help from others and too often with her own money.

Inside the \$85,000 Cattery live Beautiful, the black and white fluffy cat; Popeye, the one-eyed calico; and Tagalong, the striped one that follows you everywhere.

Greyboy, Sandy and Mel and the rest moved into the new place in January from a converted garage on one side of Perry's 2½-acre property. The Cattery cost plenty — about \$29,000 and a few headaches more than Perry had budgeted.

It's a pain to clean the concrete walkways and fenced patios that should have been installed with smooth surfaces but have ridges that trap dirt and droppings, Perry complained.

And now that they have a permanent home, the cats need attention, she said. "They want love and affection," Perry said. More of the two than she and her two paid helpers can give, she added.

"If some elderly would just come here and sit down and pet these cats," she said.

Caring for the cats starts early seven days a week. Typically, the work begins around 7 a.m. in her home for the Room 8 Foundation, Perry's non-profit shelter organization named after a cat made famous 20 years ago by a classroom of elementary school students in Los Angeles who adopted the stray. The house cats, including Tripod, a cat missing its front right leg, eat their breakfast with Perry, a widow.

The cats nap while their caretaker walks a few yards to the Cattery, to start the daily clean-up and feeding chores. The Cattery is always a smelly place, full of meows and scratching.

Cats there are evenly divided

into cage-like rooms equipped with wooden and wire fencing doors that are always shut. When cats arrive, they are cleaned, given shots and are spayed or neutered.

By around noon, the litter boxes are clean and dry newspaper lines the floors of the cats' rooms. Perry and her two helpers next go to the kitchen and get their pans out. The smell of 4½ pounds of dry food, 18 tall cans of cereal-rich cat food, 16 short cans of mostly-meat food, brewer's yeast for vitamins and warm water all mixed together has the cats howling.

The food is served in metal food trays that are emptied by the cats within minutes. Cats that are afraid of coming out of hiding places and loners are fed single servings in small dishes. "You just know after a while who likes what," Perry explains.

Lunch over, silence falls over the Cattery and the caretakers move on to the next chore. For Perry, who turned 83 last month, the chores don't stop until mid-afternoon, when she rests for a couple of hours.

Perry does little else but care for the cats. Boxes filled with documents, books, her beloved cat scrapbooks and posters are all over her house, still unpacked after 18 months.

She answers her mail, files periodic government reports on behalf of the foundation, watches television and sleeps in a reclining arm chair that gives her permanently injured back some comfort. "I know this isn't normal for other people. But it's normal for me," she said.

Her four grown children, 12 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren have quit trying to persuade her to give it all up. "This is my project and I don't expect any help from them."

But she needs help, she said. She gladly accepts monetary contributions and volunteer work, she said. Last year, she spent \$10,000 more to keep up the shelter than she took in.

The Room 8 Foundation will take in cats that have no homes, in exchange for a donation to keep the shelter going, Perry said. Also, Perry welcomes contributions of money, newspapers and other goods. Additional information may be obtained by calling the foundation at 681-9609.