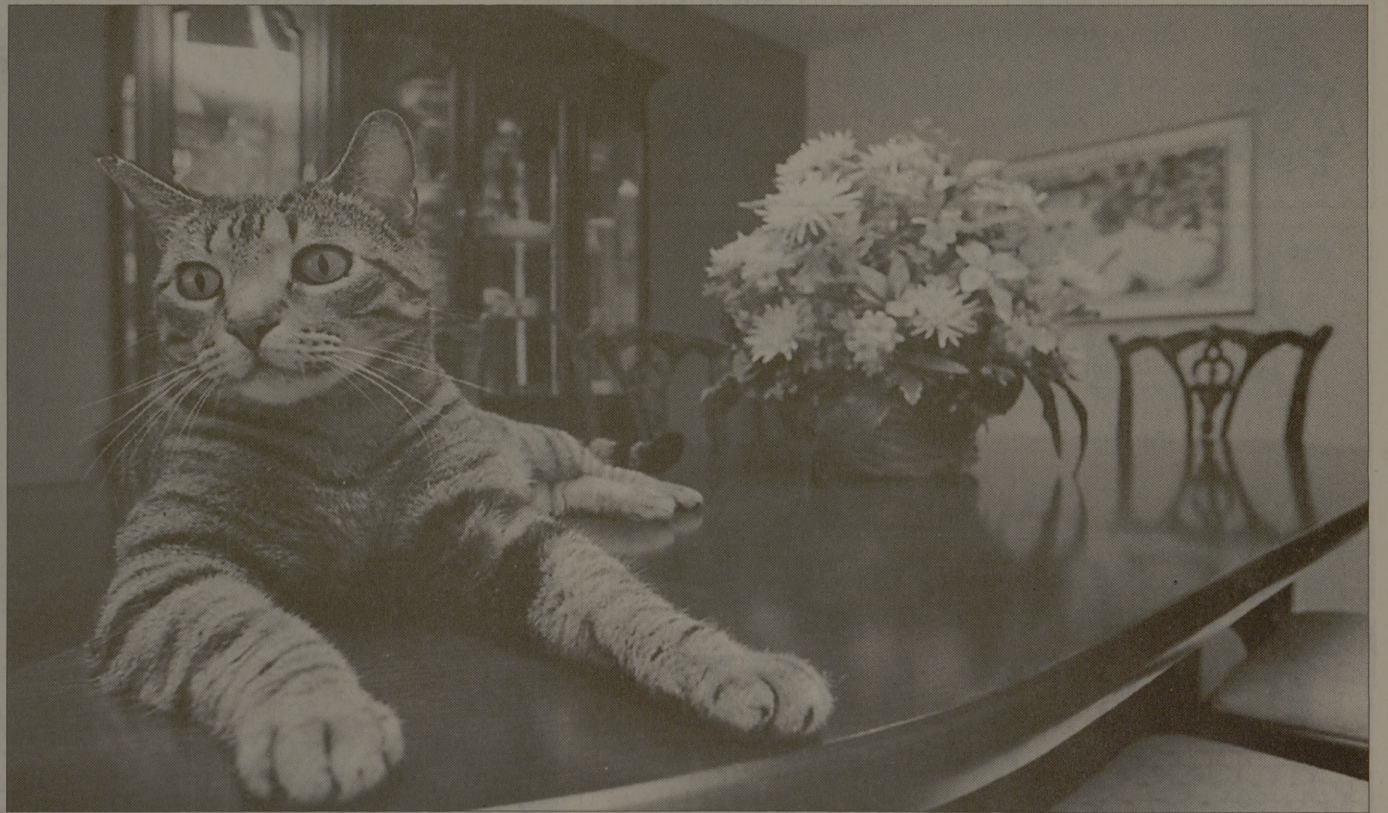


# Home is where the Pet is

*Animals who have lost their families  
 find a new set of companions at a  
 unique pet care center.*

Photos by Dave House



Sweet William, a male tabby cat, lies on a table in the dining room of the Stevenson Companion Animal Life Care Center.

BY JOSEPH NOVAK  
 THE BATTALION

It is an "animal house" in the purest sense of the term. Only in Aggieland would a 5,000-square-foot structure be constructed solely for previously owned pets to freely roam its halls. The Stevenson Companion Animal Life-Care Center is the only center of its kind.

Dr. Sally Knight, Director of the center, said it started as an idea of Dr. E.W. "Ned" Ellett, a faculty member

of the College of Veterinary Medicine. Ellett dreamed of having a center of this nature, and his ideas were printed in the Houston Chronicle, where they drew the attention of Madlin Stevenson. "Mrs. Stevenson is a great animal-lover and philanthropist, and has a number of animals herself," Knight said. "She became interested in the idea and she provided the initial funds for the construction of this building. And the Luse Foundation provided the additional funds."

The center cares for pets when their owners can no longer do so. This is prearranged with the center by the owner, and the owner must make an endowment for the center. For small animals such as cats and dogs, the endowment is \$25,000, and for large animals such as horses, ponies and llamas, the endowment is \$50,000.

Once this endowment is made, the animal will be delivered to the center if the owner dies or cannot take care of it. The endowment is invested in an interest-bearing account, and the interest is used to provide care for the animal and support programs of the center during the animal's life. When the animal dies, the endowment remains in the College of Veterinary Medicine and the interest is used for student scholarships, research programs or a service of the donor's choice.

As of now, 180 pets have been enrolled in the program by 60 owners. Should any of these owners become incapacitated, these animals will find a

home in the center.

The center is a building designed to look and feel exactly like an upscale house. The front door has a doorbell and leads to a well-decorated lobby. Contemporary sofas and end tables complement the carpet and curtains. The dining room contains a well-polished table and a cabinet full of china. The playroom contains furniture and toys for visitors to interact with the playful animals. And there are pet apartments specifically designated for cats and dogs.

The center also contains a veterinary clinic. The animals are visited by a veterinarian twice a year for full clinical examinations, and receive a biweekly checkup.

In addition to trying to keep the animals comfortable, the center also keeps them company. Two student veterinary residents, who live in the home, care for the animals on evenings, weekends and holidays when the other staff is absent.

Erin Auld and Tanya Anderson, second-year veterinary students in the College of Veterinary Medicine professional curriculum, are the current residents.

Auld said she doesn't see her duties as a job, but as a part of her home.

"This is our family for however long we're here, and that's how we treat

them, and they treat us the same way," Auld said.

Two dogs and two cats live at the center, and each animal brings a story with it.

Knight said Sandy, a white female cockapoo, and Sweet William, a male tabby cat, were owned by a woman in Dallas who had to go into a nursing home, so her pets were taken to the Companion Animal Center.

"After she was in the nursing home, we took Sandy to visit her," Knight said. "We didn't take William — he doesn't travel as well as Sandy. But it was always a very joyful reunion."

Jill, a white female poodle, lived with an elderly woman in San Antonio.

Mr. Jones, a long-haired domestic male cat, is the newest addition to the center.

These animals will

*"This is our family for however long we're here, and that's how we treat [the animals], and they treat us the same way."*  
 Erin Auld  
 Veterinarian resident

remain at the center for the the rest of their lives.

While the pets are here for their comfort, they are also used in animal behavior research. Knight said this project is a serious one.

"And the reason this is designed as a home is because we're doing something that is different," Knight said. "These animals live together as a family."



Sandy, a female cockapoo, sits behind a cat toy.

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