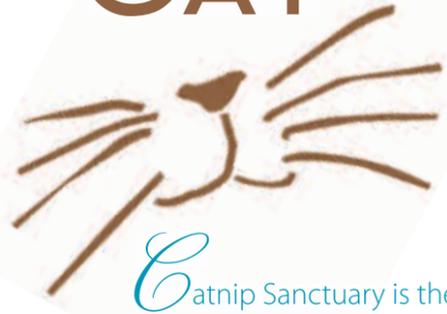


# CATNIP SANCTUARY

## COQUILLE SENIOR WOMAN DEVOTED TO AGING KITTIES

Nikki Jardin • Spot Magazine  
All photos by Nikki Jardin



Catnip Sanctuary is the very definition of a labor of love. For nearly two decades, Margaret "Muff" Mentch has provided comfort, companionship and shelter for 50 cats in her private rescue in Coquille, Oregon. The shelter operates on the retiree's limited income, and her steadfast dedication to unwanted animals.

While Catnip is Mentch's focus today, the sanctuary is not her first foray into animal rescue. That began more than 60 years ago. "I rescued my first kitten when I was six, and it started a fire in my soul," she says. Now at 71, Mentch says she's taken in hundreds of cats, dozens of dogs, several horses and "one Spanish-speaking old burro" over the years, and her passion remains high. "That fire is still burning strong," she says, "though my body is limiting me to these wonderful cats."

Several years ago Mentch decided to devote her resources to senior felines, since there weren't many options for older cats in her Southern Oregon region. "It became pretty obvious that no one wanted to deal with the old babies," she says.

Her dedication to her "old babies" is apparent. While guiding a tour, Mentch constantly petted, brushed and fussed over the dozens of lounging, chatty and purring cats languishing in the relaxed sanctuary. She not only greets each one by name, but shares the stories on how they all came to call Catnip home.

Pointing out a fluffy, supine white cat, Mentch says, "This is Winston," heading over to give him a pet. "He came into a local shelter, and we didn't even know he was a white cat — that's how dirty he was."

Approaching a longhair she introduces as Buddy, Mentch shares how she first met him at the veterinarian's office, where a woman intended to put him down. "This woman talked about his many health problems, and that's why she was putting him to sleep . . ." Mentch strokes Buddy's fur, her voice cracking while telling the story. "Well now, that was five years ago, wasn't it Buddy?"

Continuing the tour, we greet Midnight, April, Tinkerbelle, Christopher, Nooner, and many more, each of whom has a Dickensian story of rejection and redemption. Some to be put down for health issues, others because they were "too old" for the shelter. Still others who'd become unwitting pawns in divorce or a burden to a growing family.

Even after all these years, Mentch is surprised by some of the stories she hears. "Just about the time you think you've heard them all, there's one to trump them," she says. Hugging Spice, an 18-year-old Tuxedo who was nearly euthanized due to an untreated bladder infection that caused her to spray, she says, "I just don't understand why people have pets if they are not going to care for them." Spice basks in the affection as Mentch lovingly places her back on her bed.

Catnip sanctuary itself is a lesson in efficiency of space. The cats are separated into three areas, each with a bedroom offering private space with several beds and perches. Each room has a window where cats easily climb out into a roomy, enclosed dayroom for sun and fresh air when the weather permits. These areas are outfitted with climbing trees, plants, and more comfy cat beds and hiding places. Wherever you turn, you are met with a sleepy blink, a welcoming meow or a typically feline gaze of shrugging disinterest. The whole atmosphere is one of calm



Muff Mentch  
cuddles Midnight



Christopher  
strolls (l) while  
Buddy awaits  
a belly rub

and contentment, down to soothing classical music playing softly in the background.

One room off the main house has an outdoor patio enclosed by tall fencing where the cats lounge safely on the grass. Mentch would love for all of the cats to be able to go outside, but hasn't been able to raise enough funds to get the work done. "I would love to have another outdoor enclosure; we just need to find the money and someone who knows how to do it."

As every rescue knows, money and sponsors are key to their very existence. Some of Mentch's cats do have sponsors, but the economy and Catnip's small-town location has made fundraising difficult, as has the digital age. "I would love to have a website, but I'm afraid the computer age has been tough on me," she says. Plus, there's the very real notion of time. Mentch does the bulk of the daily work herself, though she does have help twice a week from two longtime devotees.

Mentch's days start with feeding, grooming and providing the medications her elderly charges require. With 50 cats, there is also more than a little litter box maintenance and several loads of daily laundry to keep the cat beds and blankets clean. Despite the work, and the toll on her body, Mentch can't imagine stopping. "My body hates me and my bones aren't good, but the cats keep me going. It's very reciprocal," she says.

Still, Mentch is realistic about her limitations. "My main thing is to outlive my babies," she says. "I'm 71, so in another 10 years, most of my kids will have gone over the Rainbow Bridge, and I just want to make them comfortable and happy until then. You know, they don't ask for anything of you except love, and that's what they give you back. They are just very special babies."

See more pictures of Catnip Sanctuary at SpotMagazine.net. To offer support, email Mentch at CatnipSanctuary@charter.net or call 541-396-6517. 



Muff Mentch with two of her charges



One of the bedrooms at Catnip

Nikki Jardin is a Portland-based freelance writer who loves to write about people dedicated to making the world a better place for all beings. 

### First Aid for Your Best Friend.



**VCA Northwest Veterinary Specialists**  
presents a hands-on lab and lecture teaching everything you need to know  
about canine/feline first aid, including Q & A and CPR & bandaging demos/labs.

Common emergencies including heat stroke, bloat and trauma,  
as well as the most common toxicities seen in the ER will be discussed.  
Each participant will receive a CPR certificate.

Community Partners



Present  
**Canine & Feline First Aid**  
with CPR Certification

Presenters  
**Dr. Donna Cassioli**  
Outreach Coordinator VCA NWVS  
**Dr. Heidi Houchen**  
Blood Bank Director  
**Dr. Gretchen Sicard**  
Surgeon

**Sunday Sept. 30,**  
**10:45am - 3pm**  
at **Oregon Dogs Inc**  
1889 Willamette Falls Dr. in West Linn

For information and Registration  
[www.vcaNWVS.com](http://www.vcaNWVS.com)

16756 SE 82nd Drive • Clackamas, OR 97015 • 503-656-3999