

# 9-5 FELINES

by Richard De Angelis, Director of Communications, DDAL  
Photos courtesy of the cats' respective guardians.

Just as more and more “working class dogs” are joining their human guardians on the job (see last issue), career-minded cats across the country are finding gainful employment in a variety of work places. Usually less fond of commuting than their canine counterparts, cats are more likely to obtain permanent positions as live-in staff. Although specializing in the areas of personnel management and public relations, they may perform any number of other duties, often pouncing on the opportunity to fill niches that their “employers” never knew existed.

## One of a Kind

The gift shop Unique, in Alexandria, Virginia, lives up to its name, thanks in part to a very special sales clerk. The store's owner, Ethel Beun, adopted Chester from the non-profit Albert Foundation when he was just under a year old (since then she has continued to help the Foundation place other cats). Many customers come just to see the yellow tabby resting snugly in his bed in the front window. In addition to his duties as a living window display, Ethel explains that “Chester's job is to be laid back and make people feel welcome.” Chester's accomplishments in this area earn him constant favorable performance reviews. “People slip Chester treats through the mailslot at night,” explains Ethel. “One morning, we actually found a fish head on the floor.”

Ethel estimates that “Ninety-five percent of the people who come here love him,” although she has to keep

an eye out for children who are sometimes too aggressive. That is why it is important to



**Top: Chester welcomes customers to Unique gift shop. Bottom: Winsor (left) and Newton show their true colors at Plaza Artist Materials.**

look for a friendly disposition when interviewing prospective non-human employees. Because kittens are often too rambunctious and unpredictable, Ethel thinks more mature mousers are better candidates, adding, “Giving an older cat a home is a nice thing to do.” And since Chester does not care for the other cats who live in the apartment upstairs, Ethel, by making room for cats both at home and at work, has

doubled her ability to adopt deserving felines.

## Picture Purr-fect

When the president of the company brought twin orange tabbies to Plaza Artist Materials in Silver Spring, Maryland six years ago, they immediately attached themselves to the manager. “The kittens introduced themselves to me by literally hanging on the end of my skirts,” remembers Sharon Ford. “For someone who had only cared for dogs, this was at first disconcerting, but over the years I have come to love them very much.”

Now that both customers and staff have grown to know Winsor, the male with the distinctive white markings, and his sister Newton, who has a favorite stick and string, the pair is never at a loss for someone to play with. The only inconvenience involved, confides Sharon, “is making sure the hairballs expelled during the night are gone by the time the store opens!”

Sharon believes that the key to keeping working cats on the payroll is to give them their space. While Winsor... “is an adventurous and affectionate extrovert, Newton is shy. She lets you interact with her only on her terms.” Whether they are lounging comfortably among the picture frames, paint sets and other art supplies in the store windows, or reclining on the counter to supervise a customer's purchase, Sharon explains that “A Plaza cat's only responsibility is to be a cat; a ‘prince’ or ‘princess’ watching over his or her domain.”



Lena drums up business at Persussion Concepts Midwest.

## Tom-Tom Cats

About four years ago, a gray short-haired cat wandered into Percussion Concepts Midwest, a Mt. Vernon, Ohio mail-order firm specializing in percussion instruments and equipment for schools and marching bands. Since he refused to leave, owners Rick and Mandy Brown named him "Shopcat" and decided to put him to work. Worried that Shopcat was bored during the late evenings and weekends when the store is closed, in 1997 the Browns let him hire some help from a local shelter. Just six months old at the time, Lena, a gray tabby, had been confiscated in an animal cruelty case that ultimately had a happy ending: she got adopted and the accused was convicted and sent to jail.

Today, Shopcat, who is about five years old, frequently hosts sales on the company website and has special offers in its new catalog. Shopcat and Lena keep office morale high. When not playing with the cat toys that litter the store, the pair enjoys wrestling with each other or the staff. "We do stop work frequently for a little cat rub," says Rick. "They are certainly entertaining and loving," he adds, "and since we have three others who

live at our house, having them at work makes our business more homelike."

"Lena does have a special job that she created all on her own," explains Rick. "Every morning she greets Steve, our UPS driver, by jumping up in his truck, running around the package compartment and sitting in his seat until it's time for him to leave. She repeats this process in the evening when Steve returns for pick ups. If the driver who comes is not Steve, Lena is disappointed."

## Puss in Boots

Tara Maginnis was visiting a friend in Russia during the summer of 1994 when she rescued a tiny, one-month-old brown tabby who was living on the streets of St. Petersburg. When the cat spent her first night indoors sleeping in a shoe-rack, she was given the name "Shoelace."

Having made the trip from Russia to the United States, Shoelace works at the undergraduate theater of the University of Alaska in Fairbanks (UAF). For the past four years, Shoelace has commuted with her adopted mom, an Associate Professor and Costume Designer at the UAF Costume Shop. This work environment offers a ready source of amusement for Shoelace. Her pastimes include playing with students and chasing beads that are rolled across the floor for her. To combat periodic boredom, Tara taught Shoelace to jump through a hoop for treats. "She likes to do this a lot," explains Tara, "especially when she tires of hunting silverfish." This is an unexpected bonus service Shoelace provides, as silverfish can damage costumes.

Bringing Shoelace to work necessitated some adjustments. One required Tara to note which actors are allergic to cats, so that

Shoelace can be kept away from their costumes. "Oddly enough," she remarks, "the allergic students are her most ardent fans. Since they can't keep cats of their own, Shoelace is one they can visit."

Another concession was having to pay for a reserved parking space. This allowed Tara to train Shoelace to run from the car to the building, a trick that took her about a month to learn. "All cat training requires the patience of water dripping on stone," warns Tara, "but once they 'get it' they have it."

Living life on the go has psychological benefits for cat and guardian as well. "Shoelace regularly accompanies me without much trouble on airplane trips and she also goes to the vet without undue trauma. And regular travel with your cat makes her bond to you, not your house, which is helpful when you move," concludes Tara.

*To learn more about 9-5 felines, or to share the resumé of your own hard-working cat, visit [www.shop-cat.com](http://www.shop-cat.com).* 🐾

**Shoelace acts nonchalant while she keeps the University of Alaska Costume Shop safe from silverfish.**

