Cats can make owners happier, healthier and gentler

By Janice Lloyd, USA TODAY

Why do 33% of the households in the USA have cats? And how do you explain why there are 16 million more pet cats than dogs?

Recently, we published a story on this page about how many ways dogs are good for our health and well-being. Cat lovers responded, demanding equal time. And so... to cats:

Yes, kittens are adorable. Yes, they can grow up to be good mousers and are very entertaining to watch. And yes, cats are independent and don't require as much care as dogs. But research shows cats can also be caretakers for us and our families, improve our health and teach us and our children to be kinder, gentler souls.

Theodora Wesselman is 94 and has lived the past two years with her elderly cat, Cleo, at TigerPlace, a retirement community in Columbia, Mo. Their enduring friendship is a classic example of how humans and animals can become family and look out for each other.

Wesselman visits other residents, and her children stop by, but Cleo is her best friend, she says. They've been together nearly 21 years.

They start and end the day together.

"She sleeps on her own pillow right beside mine," Wesselman says. "In the morning, she peeks on my cheek to wake me up. It's really sweet. I pet her, tell her I love her and take her to the kitchen to prepare her food."

Cleo and Wesselman "live for each other. I really think they keep each other going," says Mary Kay Swanson, a TigerPlace employee.

Research shows that being able to care for a pet improves our morale, helps validate us and encourages us to take care of ourselves, says Rebecca Johnson, director of the University of Missouri's Research Center for Human-Animal Interaction. The body of research is leading more retirement communities and universities to roll out the welcome mat for pets.
Is one pet better for you than another? A cat can't make you healthier by begging with leash in mouth to go out for a jog, but a purr can lower blood pressure and quiet a stressed-out brain, research shows.

And they insist on compassion. They're enforcers, Johnson says. "A dog will let you bang it on the head and still love you. A cat won't do that. Children have to learn to be gentle to cats or the cat will go away."

Some parents welcome feline help reinforcing values during child-rearing, and the cats become an integral part of the family.

When one of their Bengal cats dashed out a window this summer, Jud and Katherine Smith of Cumberland, Maine, and their two daughters were so upset that they took out a full-page ad for three days in *The Portland Press Herald* with their telephone number, a photo of Kaden and an offer of a $500 reward.

Three weeks went by before someone found Kaden 7 miles away from home. He was lighter and tired, but he's "back with his family," Jud says.

Cleo's health recently concerned Swanson. Before veterinarians detected she had diabetes they could treat with insulin, Swanson talked with Wesselman about putting Cleo down.

Cleo was standing nearby during the conversation. Wesselman was distraught.

"I think Cleo overheard us talking," Swanson says. "She rebounded the next day. I've never seen Theodora so grateful or happy. Cleo is doing well. She's off insulin, and we're monitoring her blood on a weekly basis."

That morning peck on the cheek and nightly tuck-in endure.
Skin Is No Barrier to BPA, Study Shows

Finding suggests handling store receipts could be significant source of internal exposure

Posted: November 2, 2010

By Janet Raloff, Science News

Bisphenol A readily passes through skin, French scientists report. Best known as an estrogen-mimicking constituent of some plastics and resins, BPA is also found in a large share of cash register receipt paper in the United States and Europe, a trio of studies recently indicated. One of the three also showed that the powdery coating easily rubs off onto the hands.

"The new study is now unequivocal in showing that yes, BPA can go through human skin," says Frederick vom Saal of the University of Missouri-Columbia.

It may also explain why a survey due to appear in an upcoming issue of Environmental Health Perspectives found that among nearly 400 pregnant Cincinnati-area women, the highest BPA concentrations were in cashiers. However, Joe M. Braun and his coauthors note, "these results should be interpreted cautiously since estimates from cashiers were based on 17 women."

The French work, posted online in advance of print in Chemosphere, was conducted at INRA, the National Institute for Agricultural Research in France. Its Toulouse-based team has been investigating excised but still living skin tissue as an alternative to live animals for safety tests of cosmetics and other chemicals.

Toxicologist Daniel Zalko and his coworkers collected pig ears from slaughterhouses within five minutes of an animal being killed. In less than two hours, the tissues were in the lab where researchers removed the skin, cut it into tiny disks and cultured each in a dish.

The scientists applied BPA at various concentrations to the dry outer surface of the skin. The lowest concentration used would have delivered a dose of BPA that is in the ballpark of what could rub off onto an equivalent area of skin from handling receipt paper, Zalko says.
After three days more than half of the BPA had diffused through the skin and into the growth medium. In a living animal, Zalko says, the diffused chemical would likely be circulating in blood throughout the body.

Enzymes active in the skin transformed the majority of the BPA into metabolites known as conjugates, which have chemical "add-ons" to the main BPA molecule. BPA principally is converted into the compounds BPA glucuronide and BPA sulfate. Though such transformations are often assumed to render a chemical nontoxic, "that would be a false assumption," Zalko says. "because any compound that has been conjugated can be deconjugated."

To validate the value of pig skin as a human surrogate, Zalko's group also ran the BPA experiments using tiny samples of healthy human skin that had been removed from the abdomens of roughly 40-year-old women during various surgical procedures. Again, almost half of the BPA applied passed completely through the skin. And Zalko cautions that this pass-through rate might be conservative since the cultured human skin samples weren't as fresh—and therefore porous—as the pig ears had been.

Moreover, far less of the BPA exiting the human skin was conjugated compared with pig skin, and what had been transformed was less likely to be in the glucuronide form.

The role of metabolites in BPA's potential toxicity is complicated, vom Saal says, because the body can—and regularly does—conjugate and deconjugate compounds. "It's well known," for instance, "that the body is full of desulfating enzymes, which play a role regulating estrogen levels during pregnancy."

These new data reinforce concerns about store receipts, he adds, "because we know from many thermal papers that receipts can contain a heck of a lot of BPA." And that BPA is about as likely to rub off receipt paper as a coating of talcum powder would be, he says.

Vom Saal's team is just launching a study with volunteers to measure not only how much BPA people get on their hands from holding thermal receipt paper, but also whether the compound goes on to show up in their blood and urine. Those data could be available by the end of the year.

Meanwhile, the leading producer of thermal-receipt stock in the United States—Appleton Papers, which claims to have been BPA-free since 2006—is looking to help consumers identify its receipts. "Consumers have made it clear that they want an easy way to distinguish Appleton's receipt paper from our competitors' paper, which all contain BPA," says company vice president Kent Willetts. "We are preparing to launch a BPA-free receipt paper that can be quickly and easily distinguished from all others. We will rush that product to market and have it in retailers' hands in time for the holiday shopping season."
Young Voters Skip Polls

Reported by: Kristofer Klingelhoetter Edited by: Ashley Colley

COLUMBIA - Voters under 30 are half as likely to vote as older voters in mid-term elections. Experts say that's because there is no celebrity excitement like in a presidential election year. This could spell trouble for Democratic candidates, who usually rely on younger voters.

Mitchell McKinney is a Communications Professor at the University of Missouri. He said the reason young voters don't come out is a combination of factors.

"These people under thirty may be moving once a year or two, they may not know who they want to vote for, or even where to vote."

There are far fewer voters in mid-term election years than in presidential election years. This trend is even more pronounced among young voters, where the number of people at the polls can be as little as half the number who voted in the preceding presidential election.

"There's no real spotlight like there is in presidential election years," McKinney said.

This trend hurts Democratic candidates more than Republicans. In 2006, young voters cast their ballots for Democrats 58 percent of the time. That year, Republicans only received votes from 36 percent of people under the age of 30.

Brennen Unnerstall is a Senior majoring in Psychology at the University of Columbia. A registered Republican, he made sure to vote this year.

"I actually had to convince some people to vote this year. Last time there was a lot of excitement for Obama, some of my friends voted for him."

Unnerstall said he thinks some of his peers were unaware of the election.

"I didn't see any commercials saying 'go out and vote' until like a week ago," Unnerstall said. He added, "There's just not as much excitement this time around."
UM curators take closer look at benefits

By Janese Silvey

Tuesday, November 2, 2010

The University of Missouri Board of Curators yesterday saw an example of what a new defined contributions plan might look like if the board were to approve a change in employee retirement plans.

UM System President Gary Forsee called on curators last year to consider changing retirement packages from the current plan, which guarantees benefits, to a plan that requires employees to save. Yesterday was the first chance they've had to see what that contributions-based plan might look like.

The defined contributions model presented a starting point for discussion, not a final proposal, which was based on input from faculty and staff. Under that plan, the university would contribute an amount equal to 5 percent of an employee’s pay into an investment plan and require an hourly worker to contribute 1 percent and a salaried individual to pay 2 percent into their individual plans. Employees would have the option of contributing more to receive a higher match from the university, and employees would have to remain at the university for three years to be vested.

Some curators expressed concern that the 401(k)-type plan simply shifts future market risks from the university to employees. Others called on the university to build a hybrid plan that would reduce university risks while guaranteeing benefits.

“You can design a plan to meet whatever objectives you want to meet,” Curator Warren Erdman of Kansas City said. “And if we reach an agreement on what our objectives are, there are smart people who can design a plan to meet those objectives.”

In the coming weeks, Forsee plans to host town hall meetings at all four campuses to discuss the issue. He has also established a faculty and staff committee to work with the system’s human resources department.

Forsee said administrators won’t recommend a change to curators next month if they’re not ready — a switch from his previous timeline. Erdman, though, concluded the meeting by saying a December vote is still possible. He said the committee should have enough time to come up with a plan that meets the university’s objectives. Those objectives, he said, should be to protect current employees and their future benefits and to provide new hires a retirement plan that shields the university from long-term market risks.

Several curators seemed leery of any change. Curator Wayne Goode said he fears new employees wouldn’t be equipped to make investment choices and suggested the university would have to provide
professional management. Curator Don Downing said he's in favor of keeping the current defined benefits plan.

Although the system's current retirement plan is fully funded, putting new, young workers into that plan is risky going forward because the market is volatile. The plan is based on an assumption that the UM System receives, on average, an 8 percent return on investments, a target that hasn't materialized in the past several years. If curators don't change the existing plan for new hires, current employees should expect to see their contribution levels increase to keep the system funded, several consultants warned.

Doing nothing, Curator David Wasinger said, would simply be “kicking the can down the road.”

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilvey@columbiatribune.com.
University of Missouri officials say they will not pursue prosecution of the now famous “Faurot 30,” those few unlucky arrested trespassers on the playing field after the Tigers’ dramatic Oct. 23 victory over Oklahoma.

MU rules were clear. It was and is illegal to get on the field after the game. But thousands did, overwhelming police officers who did “the best they could,” arresting those they could “get a hold of.” After this provocative example of selective enforcement, state Sen. Kurt Schaefer called on MU not to prosecute the young offenders, thereby avoiding notice of the arrests showing up on their records. Schaefer’s idea received widespread support, and after “careful consideration,” MU Chancellor Brady Deaton announced arrest paperwork would not be turned over to city prosecutors, apparently ending the discussion.

In the midst of all this hoo-ha, I suggested here the university consider dropping the anti-trespassing rule altogether in favor of a more realistic police presence protecting the goal posts and guarding against the sort of dangerous misbehavior on the field that should be prohibited in the stands or anywhere else on university property.

Now that a day-after calm has settled in, we have time for a more measured evaluation of circumstances.

First, consider the position of the university. Officials on campus years ago made their rule against trespassing on the field to avoid injury and associated institutional liability. Even though it’s obvious their rule can’t dissuade a wildly motivated crowd, their lawyers might think the absence of a stated and reasonably enforced rule would encourage successful charges from injured people alleging university officials did not even try to protect against injuries. A lack of rules equals encouragement of mayhem and likelihood of damage to students and others invited on university property, etc., etc.

For this reason, the university should make clear its opposition to invaders on the field, but should it try to enforce this policy by physically arresting anyone who sets foot on the turf? Perhaps notice of the policy plus police action against more egregious behavior would be as effective without excessive repression. Perhaps state law should specifically exempt the institution from liability if it does everything reasonable short of actually proposing to arrest people for the mere act of coming onto the field to celebrate.
Sadly, it might be a long time before fans have something as exciting to celebrate as they did on Oct. 23, but we should use these reflective moments to rationalize the university’s stance. If no easing of the rule is to be made, it would be good for the institution to explain carefully why not.

HJW III
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Increase in recycling at MU drives purchase of new city truck

By Regina Wang
November 2, 2010 | 11:18 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Since October 2009, the city has collected about 545 tons of recyclables at MU — about 95 tons a month and enough to justify a city recycling truck just for campus.

The $150,000 truck will be financed by the city, MU and a grant from the Mid-Missouri Solid Waste Management district.

Since October 2009, the city has been picking up recyclables such as paper and beverage containers on campus, Steve Burdie, MU sustainability coordinator, said.

"A new truck would be helpful," Burdie said. "We're increasing in paper and beverage containers every month."

The city will cover half of the cost, $75,000. A grant from the Mid-Missouri Solid Waste Management will pay $50,000, and the university will cover the remaining $25,000.

The city has one truck that takes care of commercial recycling, and it goes to the campus three times a week. More than 95 tons of recyclables — mostly cardboard, paper and beverage containers — each month from MU soon wore down the city's pickup capacity, said Layli Terrell, waste minimization supervisor for Columbia.

"It's burdensome because the university is huge," Terrell said.

In 2009, when the city negotiated a contract with the university to continue the trash service, the university asked it to take over recycling, said Jill Stedem of the city Public Works Department.

The city is in the process of ordering the truck, Stedem said, adding that the beginning of 2011 is the earliest the truck would be in service.