

Fancy Feet

Florida shelter promotes stylish alternative to declawing

BY CARRIE ALLAN

Cats at the Humane Society of Vero Beach and Indian River County in Florida recently got some major spa-day spoiling: manicures! Dragon ladies (and men) were equipped with faux nails called Soft Paws as part of the shelter's efforts to educate pet owners and potential adopters about alternatives to declawing.

"We know it's a surgery of convenience," says Janet Winikoff, director of education. "Most people just think it's like nail trimming and they don't realize that it's an actual amputation. So we wanted to educate people in a whimsical way about other options. There are scratching posts, nail trimming ... This was another alternative."

The brightly colored plastic tips on the kitties' claws engaged shelter visitors and prompted questions about whether the nails were painted, allowing staff to do on-the-spot education by explaining the purpose of Soft Paws: to prevent damage to rugs and furniture while still letting cats carry on with their natural behaviors. But they had another positive side effect: People seemed to be more attracted to the fancy cats. By the end of one weekend when the staff put the nails on certain cats, about 90 percent of those cats had been adopted.

Next on the beauty menu: Seaweed wraps for fatter cats, or whisker lifts? **AS**



JANET WINIKOFF/HSVB