

Reinventing the Wheel(chair)

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SUMNER FOWLER

Jan Darmody loved volunteering at the spay/neuter clinic at the Marin Humane Society—but her aching back didn't. After animals came out of surgery at the shelter in Novato, Calif., Darmody laid them on blankets on the clinic floor, frequently crouching down to check on them as the anesthesia wore off. Whenever an animal was ready to return to his kennel but not yet able to walk, the transport took some maneuvering.

"You've got to get down on your knees and pick this animal up in your arms, being very careful to support the animal's head and back and everything, and stand up from a kneeling position without being able to use your hands to boost yourself up," says Darmody. "For those of us of a certain age, that's pretty difficult to do."

Today, volunteers no longer leave the clinic feeling like they've just had a session

with a personal trainer. By topping a cart on wheels with a cage, Darmody came up with a safe, easy way to take an animal from the operating table to the recovery area and then to his kennel. She calls her invention the post-op recovery cage. "Everybody loves it," she says. "It makes a huge difference in how tired your back is at the end of the day."

For the prototype, Darmody found an unused rolling cart at the shelter and fashioned a cage by cutting up two plastic laundry baskets and duct-taping them together. Then she attached the cage to the cart with bungee cords. After a two-week trial in the clinic, the prototype was deemed a hit.

In the final design, Darmody replaced the laundry baskets with a cage made of plastic landscape lattice, making sure the holes were small enough to prevent puppies or kittens from getting their heads stuck.

Her invention took about two hours to make. "I did a lot of sketches, trying to make sure that the concept was right and that it was going to work," she says. "But once I started making it, everything pretty much came together as I had envisioned it."

A bonus feature of the cart was a shelf that could hold the clinic's microwave. After surgeries, volunteers place heated beanbags next to recovering animals because body temperatures drop during anesthesia. "[Before,] we were always running back and forth to the kennel kitchen to warm these things up," says Darmody.

Darmody's recovery-cage-slash-microwave-holder revealed yet another use during a recent fire drill. When the alarm sounded, an animal was lying in the recovery cage, so volunteers simply unplugged the microwave and rolled the cart out of the building. **AS**