



Places to Meet Cute

The opening of America's first cat café in 2014 sparked an adoption-friendly trend.

BY KATY STEINMETZ



IN 2014, DOZENS OF OAKLAND RESIDENTS QUEUED UP TO partake of a new phenomenon that brought together cats and drip coffee. The founders of Cat Town café, a hybrid drinkery and “cat zone,” held a grand opening for the nation’s first permanent cat café—a furry fantasy others had tried to realize only to be derailed by funding problems and pesky health codes.

“The cat café, to us, is fun schtick on top of a serious rescue operation,” said Adam “Catman” Myatt, a photographer who cofounded Cat Town with Ann Dunn, on the occasion of its precedent-setting opening. Disheartened by the cramped, scarring conditions at local animal services, Dunn started a nonprofit foster program in 2010 to help whiskery creatures find homes. That operation, Cat Town, became the springboard for the spot in downtown Oakland, where customers frolicked with adoptable felines while munching bagels.

“This is kind of my dream vision of what Cat Town would be like,” said Julie Sammons, an employee at nearby University of California, Berkeley, as she stroked one cat in her lap and another sprawled preciously on a burlap cat bed beside her.

The success of this café turned out to be inspirational, showing that what had been popular in Asia could work in the United States. The planet’s first cat café had opened in Taiwan in 1998 and then took



NEKO in Seattle was inspired by the owner's visits to cat cafés in Asia, where the phenomenon first took root.