



## "Working Cats" program gives hard-to-adopt felines jobs at businesses

By Mary Carole McCauley, Baltimore Sun, adapted by Newsela staff on 10.19.17

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Cat on patrol! A cat wanders the grounds of the Los Angeles Flower Market in Los Angeles, California. Some local business owners in Los Angeles; Baltimore, Maryland; and other cities participate in the Working Cats program. This program places feral cats in local businesses to repel rodents. Photo by: Mark Boster/Los Angeles Times via Getty Images

Not long ago, Inky the cat was angry and frightened. The only way his rescuers at BARCS could handle him was by trapping the 4-year-old black cat with a net.

Then Inky got a job doing pest control through the "Working Cat" program run by the Baltimore Animal Rescue & Care Shelter (BARCS) Inc. Almost overnight, his outlook on life reversed 180 degrees.

"The first day that BARCS brought Inky to us, he was hissing and really unhappy," said Tom Foster. He is the co-founder of Diamondback Brewing Co. and Inky's "employer."

"I thought, 'Oh, I don't know if this is going to work out.' But, then he got here and it was like a switch went off. I don't think he's hissed once since that day. He's gotten extremely friendly. He'll let me pick him up, and he'll jump on my lap when he wants to be petted."

## **Cats For Commercial Company**

Inky is just one of the more than 100 success stories of the BARCS program. It places difficult-to-adopt cats on farms, at warehouses, in nurseries and in other commercial settings.

Starting in 2012, BARCS began a small version of what then was called its Barn Cat program. Organizers reasoned that some cats weren't meant to be pets. But these cats would be happy living a life with minimal human contact in which they nonetheless provided a useful service: rodent control. Meanwhile, humans in need of said service would provide the animals with food, shelter and medical care.

"Some cats can't be placed in a home," said Bailey Deacon, BARCS' director of communications. "Some won't use a litter box. Others are feral and haven't been socialized. Some get over-stimulated and the only outlet they have for their energies is by hunting humans."

Inky, for instance, came from a house where refuse was piled floor to ceiling, Deacon said. He'd lash out with his claws and teeth at any human who came near.

BARCS' staff kept Inky under observation for a long time, waiting to see if his attitude would change. When it didn't, they thought he might be a candidate for alternative placement.

As part of the program, BARCS donates the cat, spays or neuters the animal for free and surgically implants an identifying microchip. The shelter even delivers the feline to its new home.

The Barn Cat program operated on a relatively small scale for four years, Deacon said. It placed about two dozen cats at area businesses during that time. But in 2016, BARCS received a six-figure grant from the Petco Foundation. Among other things, the grant allowed it to hire a full-time staff member to run the rebranded Working Cat program.

Since Amber Ketchum took the job at BARCS last December, Deacon said, she has placed more than 90 cats at area businesses. She is well on her way to exceeding her 2017 goal of more than 100 placements.

### **Cats With No Other Options**

"This is truly a life-saving program," Deacon said.

"There was no other option for these cats. They would have sat and sat and sat and never been able to find a home. And the program has freed up cage space so we can place more indoor cats with families."

Foster and his business partner, Colin Marshall, agreed to adopt Inky last winter because they wanted to give natural rodent control a try. Not only was their 7,000-square-foot Locust Point brewing facility filled with the barley used to brew the beer, it also was quite warm.

"It was mouse heaven," Foster said.

They didn't want to use chemical controls in a building where they were making a beverage for people to drink. But they found that traditional traps baited with peanut butter or cheese were



ineffective. So when BARCS got in touch to suggest that the brewery adopt a cat, Foster and Marshall were willing to give Inky a try.

Within days of his arrival, Inky had dispatched half a dozen mice. The brewery's rodent problem was a thing of the past. Perhaps because he finally was out of his cage and in a place where he was cared for and felt secure, Inky quickly became attached to the two men. And vice-versa.

"We haven't had a single mouse problem since Inky came," Foster said. "His main job now is keeping us company and supervising our work."

## Quiz

- 1 Read the section "Cats For Commercial Company." Select the paragraph from the section that explains what BARCS does to prepare the cats before they begin their jobs.
- 2 Which sentence in the section "Cats With No Other Options" supports the conclusion that the BARCS program has ended up helping out the shelters?
- (A) "This is truly a life-saving program," Deacon said.
  - (B) "And the program has freed up cage space so we can place more indoor cats with families."
  - (C) They didn't want to use chemical controls in a building where they were making a beverage for people to drink.
  - (D) "His main job now is keeping us company and supervising our work."
- 3 Which sentence from the article would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
- (A) The only way his rescuers at BARCS could handle him was by trapping the 4-year-old black cat with a net.
  - (B) "He'll let me pick him up, and he'll jump on my lap when he wants to be petted."
  - (C) Foster and his business partner, Colin Marshall, agreed to adopt Inky last winter because they wanted to give natural rodent control a try.
  - (D) Not only was their 7,000-square-foot Locust Point brewing facility filled with the barley used to brew the beer, it also was quite warm.
- 4 Which statement is a MAIN idea of the article?
- (A) Some cats have been adopted by companies as an alternative to staying in shelters.
  - (B) Inky is a cat that was angry and frightened when he first began the Working Cat program.
  - (C) Some difficult-to-adopt cats focus energy on hunting humans because they are over-stimulated.
  - (D) The Barn Cat program operated on a relative small scale for many years before it got more funding.