



# 2024 Annual Report



# Message from the Co-Presidents

Dear Friends,

As we reflect on 2024, we are filled with gratitude and pride for the incredible strides Whiskers has made this year. From our successful merger with AnimaLovers to the progress on our new shelter initiative, this has been a transformative year for our organization.

The merger with AnimaLovers has strengthened our mission, expanded our reach, and allowed us to help more cats than ever before. Together, we've touched the lives of over 655 cats this year, providing them with care, love, and the opportunity to find forever homes.

We also made significant progress toward our goal of securing a new shelter that will provide a spacious, enriching, and tranquil abode for our precious cats. This effort began in 2023 and continued steadily throughout 2024, as we took important steps to bring our vision closer to reality. To date, thanks to the generosity of our supporters, over \$500,000 has been allocated to this critical project—laying a strong foundation for the efforts that still lie ahead.

At the heart of Whiskers is an unwavering commitment to the cats who need us most. As a no-kill, all-volunteer organization, we provide sanctuary for the vulnerable—whether they are sick, elderly, feral, or simply waiting for the right home. Every cat we rescue receives the love and care they deserve, whether they stay with us for a short time or a lifetime. Our work is made possible entirely by our compassionate community of volunteers, supporters, and community partners who believe, as we do, that every cat matters.

Thank you for being part of our journey to give every cat a chance at a better life.

With gratitude,  
Gretchen Zegger & Laura Conway  
Co-Presidents

## Whiskers Mission

Our mission is to provide abandoned, abused, and stray animals with a place of comfort, safety, and health and ultimately find them loving, responsible, permanent homes. We specialize in helping animals that have no advocate, those that have been abandoned on the streets or who have been abused. Secondly, we seek to reduce the population of unwanted companion animals by arranging for their spaying/neutering prior to their adoption. Finally, we seek to provide information to the public on how to better provide for and enjoy their companion animals.





## Whiskers Story



Whiskers Animal Benevolent League began in 1982 with the vision of Joan Duer, an antique store owner with a passion for helping animals. Concerned about the growing number of stray cats in Albany, she opened the Whiskers Thrift Store, using all proceeds to fund spay/neuter efforts and provide sanctuary for homeless cats.



What started as a small grassroots effort has grown into a fully established rescue organization. Over the years, Whiskers has moved between various locations in Albany, but one thing has never changed—our commitment to being a no-kill, volunteer-run rescue. Whiskers provides care for abandoned, abused, sick, and feral cats, as well as those who are often overlooked due to age or medical needs.



In 1999, Whiskers reached a significant milestone by purchasing its first building—a modest row house built in 1900 on a busy avenue in Albany. While the building itself is far from glamorous, it has served as a vital sanctuary for cats in need. For over 25 years, this space has been a place of hope and healing, where countless cats have found safety and love. As we look ahead to our dream of a new shelter, this house will always hold a special place in our history as a testament to our resilience and dedication to our mission.



Unlike many shelters, Whiskers is a free-roaming facility, allowing cats to live in a cage-free environment where they can socialize and feel safe. Some cats stay with us only briefly before finding their forever families, while others—due to age, illness, or temperament—live out their lives in our care.

In addition to our shelter, we run a foster program that plays a vital role in our mission. Pregnant cats, young kittens, and special-needs cats often thrive best in the nurturing environment of a foster home. Our foster families provide these cats with individualized care, helping them grow, heal, and prepare for adoption. This program not only saves lives but also extends our reach beyond the walls of our shelter, ensuring that even the most vulnerable cats have a chance at a brighter future.

Now, in our 43rd year, Whiskers continues to grow and evolve. With our recent merger with AnimaLovers and plans for a new shelter on the horizon, we are more committed than ever to providing the highest level of care to cats in need. Thanks to the dedication of our volunteers and the generosity of our supporters, we look forward to saving even more lives in the years to come.



## Organization and Leadership

Whiskers, Inc., doing business as Whiskers Animal Benevolent League, is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization registered with the New York State Charities Registration Bureau. We are also Registered Rescue #RR-304 with New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.

### Board of Directors

#### **Gretchen Zegger**

Position: Co-President

Tenure on Board: 20+ years

#### **Sandra Sidoti**

Positions: Vice President & Secretary

Tenure on Board: 20+ years

#### **Courtney Harrison**

Position: Treasurer

Tenure on Board: 1+ years

#### **Mary Lou Baker**

Position: Director of Clifton Park Adoption Center and Special Adoption Events

Tenure on Board: 15+ years

#### **Mandi Loss**

Position: Director of Foster Program

Tenure on Board: 1+ years

#### **Laura Conway**

Position: Co-President

Tenure on Board: 10+ years

#### **Mary Gardy**

Position: Director of Information Technology & Fundraising Chair

Tenure on Board: 20+ years

#### **Alexis Stefanacci**

Position: Director of Shelter Medicine

Tenure on Board: 10+ years

#### **Joanne Owens**

Position: Director of Shelter Facility

Tenure on Board: 5+ years

Whiskers is proud to be a 100% volunteer-run organization. Every aspect of our operations—from cleaning litter boxes and administering medications to managing finances and strategic planning—is carried out by individuals who give their time and hearts without compensation.

Our Volunteer Coordinators, **Keith Martens**, **Mary Raiti** and **Lisa Wilson** play a vital role. They recruit, interview, and onboard new volunteers, ensuring that our shelter and retail adoption centers are staffed by compassionate, reliable individuals who share our mission. These dedicated coordinators support a diverse team of volunteers who care for the cats seven days a week—feeding, cleaning, socializing, and helping prepare them for adoption. Their efforts are essential to maintaining the high quality of life that Whiskers is known for.

# 2024 Highlights

## Merger with AnimaLovers: Expanding Our Reach and Impact

In June of 2024, the New York State Attorney General approved the merger of Whiskers and AnimaLovers—a significant milestone that strengthens our shared mission to rescue and rehabilitate homeless, abandoned, and abused cats and to ultimately find them loving homes. This unification brings together two long-standing, all-volunteer organizations with deep roots in the Capital Region and a combined history of compassion, expertise, and commitment to animal welfare.

Whiskers has long operated a free-roaming cat shelter in Albany, housing up to 150 cats at a time, while also supporting a network of foster homes. AnimaLovers, a foster-based rescue, has earned a strong reputation through its adoption partnerships with PetSmart in East Greenbush and its history of providing loving care for cats in foster homes. By joining forces, we are better equipped to serve a wider geographic area and to meet the growing demand for rescue and adoption services.

The merger brings several key benefits:

- Increased capacity to foster and care for homeless cats through an expanded network of volunteers and foster homes.
- Greater visibility and reach, with adoption outlets now located at East Greenbush PetSmart, Clifton Park PetSmart, and Albany's Pet Supplies Plus.
- Stronger infrastructure for future growth, thanks to a broadened donor base, shared resources, and increased community engagement.

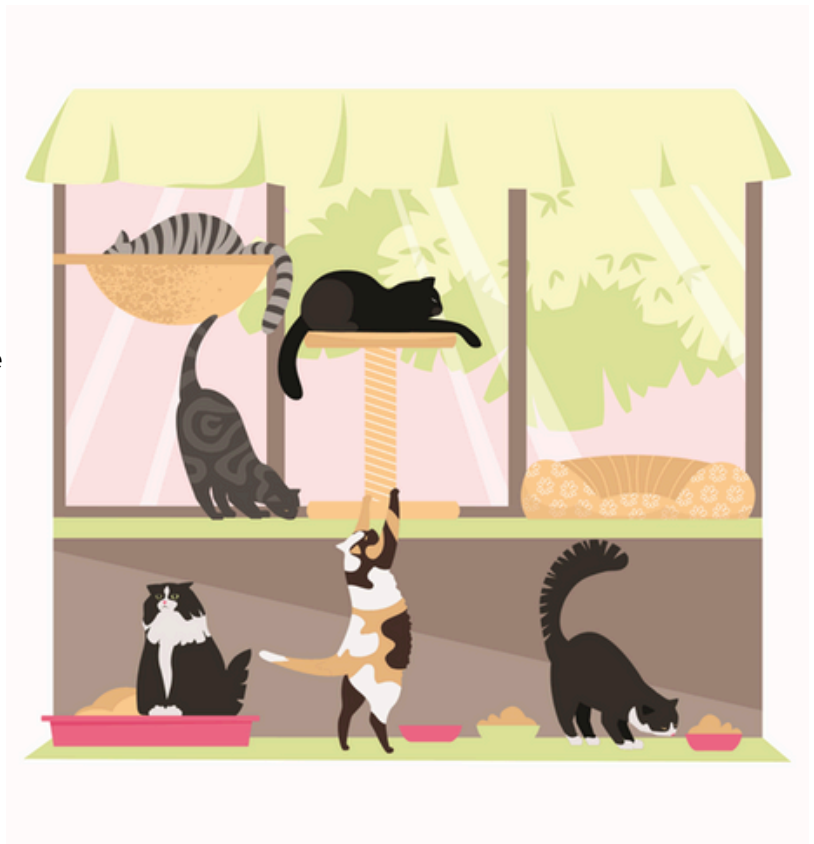
Beyond logistics, the merger has enriched both organizations. We've welcomed experienced AnimaLovers volunteers into the Whiskers community. The spirit of collaboration and mutual respect has been inspiring, and our shared values—compassion, advocacy, and a no-kill philosophy—have made this merger successful.

This merger marks a new chapter for Whiskers, one that ensures a brighter future for cats in the region and strengthens our ability to provide comfort, safety, and care to those in need.



## New Shelter Initiative

In response to the NYS Companion Animal Care Standards Act, which takes effect in December 2025, Whiskers is committed to strengthening its organization to meet the new requirements. This legislation imposes sweeping regulations on all 501(c)(3) shelters and rescues, aiming to improve the lives of sheltered companion animals. Key provisions of the Act affecting Whiskers include a maximum of 12 cats per room, regardless of room size, and a minimum of 18 square feet per cat. Additionally, shelters must meet higher standards for construction materials, drainage, sanitation, lighting, and air handling. Organizations will also be required to obtain licenses and will be subject to inspections to ensure compliance.



Meeting these new standards presents significant challenges for Whiskers. For example, the current shelter, due to its size, would only be able to accommodate approximately 61 free-roaming cats under the new regulations. To address this, Whiskers launched the Shelter Kickstart initiative in September 2023 to raise funds toward the acquisition of a property that could be renovated to create a larger, modern cat shelter. This new facility will provide cats with more space, comfort, and an enriched living environment. We are thrilled to report that by the end of 2024, the Shelter Kickstart campaign had raised \$376,487, with an additional \$147,000 contributed during the first quarter of 2025—bringing the total to over \$500,000.

The Shelter Kickstart campaign has made tremendous progress, but we still have a long way to go. To meet the new standards and create a sanctuary worthy of the cats we serve, we continue to rely on the generosity of our supporters. Whether it's a one-time gift, a monthly donation, or a legacy gift through your estate, every contribution brings us closer to our goal. Naming opportunities within the new facility will be available for those who wish to honor a loved one, a cherished pet, or their own commitment to animal welfare. To donate or learn more, please visit [www.ewhiskers.com/shelterkickstart](http://www.ewhiskers.com/shelterkickstart).





## Success Stories - Making a Difference One Life at a Time

In 2024, Whiskers cared for 655 cats, including 393 new intakes. Of these, 338 were adopted into loving homes. Whiskers takes in cats that many other rescues would not. We give them time to heal and the opportunity to thrive no matter what their issues are. Here are a few of our challenges and successes.

### Sassy

Injured and hungry, Sassy dragged herself up some steps and onto a porch where folks left food for the neighborhood strays. The people feeding brought her to the emergency clinic where they determined she had a broken pelvis, likely from being hit by a car, and suggested they euthanize her. Not wanting to do that, they brought her home and put her into a laundry basket. They called Whiskers to ask for help. It wasn't long until we realized that Sassy was pregnant. Our vet showed us the X-rays and explained that the severity of the fracture would make the delivery very risky for both mom and kittens. Whiskers worked with a vet that specialized in cesarean sections to ensure a safe delivery. With the help of caring veterinarians and volunteers, Sassy brought four healthy kittens into the world.



### Cascade's Rescue: Compassion in Action



Cascade was born outside with a defect called Patent Urachus, where the opening between his bladder and belly button didn't close after birth as it normally should. When he was rescued at about six weeks old, he had a severe urinary tract infection and badly scalded skin from being continually soaked with urine. At five months old, he was finally big enough to undergo the delicate surgery needed to correct the defect. Thanks to our generous donors whose financial support makes these life-saving medical procedures possible, Cascade is now thriving in his forever home.

## Mateo's Journey: From Abandoned to Adored

Mateo's story began on the streets of Rensselaer, where a Whiskers volunteer spotted him while visiting a friend. Neighbors knew the injured cat well—he had been limping for some time, too elusive to catch. Some believed his owners had abandoned him after a dog in the home hurt him, leaving him to fend for himself with a fractured hind leg.

When Mateo arrived at Whiskers on May 7, 2024, he was affectionate and trusting, as if he knew he was safe. An x-ray revealed an old fracture in his left hind leg, and after consultations, amputation was deemed the best option.

He came through surgery with flying colors, and his devoted fosters made sure he was surrounded by love every step of the way. It was no surprise that Mateo's foster family fell head over heels for him and decided to adopt him, giving him the forever home that he deserved. Cats like Mateo are at the heart of Whiskers' mission—to be a lifeline for the abandoned, the injured, and the overlooked. His story is a powerful reminder of the resilience of animals and the life-changing impact of compassion.



## Ginger's Miracle: Beating the Odds Against FIP

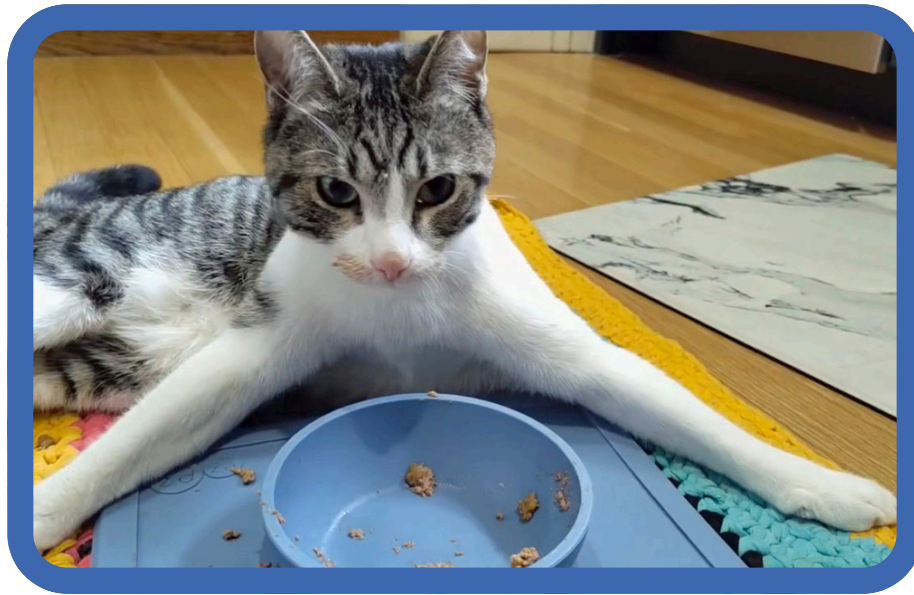
Ginger was surrendered to Whiskers along with her four kittens. She was very sick, losing weight and lethargic with a swollen belly. She was diagnosed with the wet variety of Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP), a serious viral disease caused by a mutated form of the feline coronavirus. Until recently, FIP was a death sentence for cats, but Ginger's foster mom began her aggressive 9-week treatment in August with a drug called GS-441524, newly available in the US. Ginger is now a healthy, beautiful cat.





## Special Needs Kittens: Wobbly but Wonderful

In 2024, our foster homes cared for several litters of kittens born with Cerebellar Hypoplasia (CH). Kittens with CH are born with an underdeveloped cerebellum—the part of the brain that controls fine motor skills and coordination. These special "wobbly cats" may stumble, sway, or have head tremors, but they experience no pain and their condition doesn't worsen over time. Despite their unsteady movements, CH cats are just as intelligent, affectionate, and playful as other cats, quickly adapting to their unique mobility challenges by developing impressive compensatory skills. Fig is one of our special kitties who was adopted into a loving home with his brother, Spruce. With a few simple accommodations like non-slip surfaces and low-sided litter boxes, these resilient felines lead full, happy lives. At Whiskers, we celebrate these extraordinary cats whose determination and joy remind us that differences do not diminish quality of life.



# Many Thanks

Whiskers has so much to be thankful for. Every life we save, every cat we care for, and every adoption we celebrate is made possible by the incredible support of our volunteers, donors, supporters, and community partners.

## To Our Volunteers

Our dedicated volunteers are the heart of Whiskers. From cleaning and feeding at the shelter and adoption centers to fostering cats, organizing events, and managing adoptions, their contributions are invaluable. Whether it's spending hours socializing shy cats, transporting animals to veterinary appointments, or helping with administrative tasks, our volunteers give their time, energy, and love to ensure every cat receives the care they deserve. We simply couldn't do this without you.



**Julianne and Tuxedo Sam**

## To Our Donors and Supporters



We are deeply grateful to our individual donors and foundations, including the Seymour Fox Memorial Foundation and River Farm America Foundation, whose generosity has made our work possible. Your financial support allows us to provide medical care, food, and shelter to cats in need. Every donation, no matter the size, helps us save lives and give cats a second chance.

**The River Farm  
America Foundation**

## To Our Community Partners

Thank you to the dedicated teams of volunteers from local businesses and organizations who donate their time for special service days. These compassionate groups roll up their sleeves to tackle essential maintenance, deep cleaning, yard work, and facility improvements that keep our shelter welcoming and safe for our cats. Your commitment to corporate social responsibility and community service makes a difference in the lives of our cats.



**Albany County Sheriff's Office  
Recruits Volunteer Day**

Special thanks to PetSmart, Pet Supplies Plus, and Curtis Lumber/Pet Connection for their continued support in helping us find homes for our adoptable cats. Your partnership in providing adoption center space has been instrumental in connecting countless cats with their forever families.



## To Everyone Who Believes in Our Mission

Finally, to everyone who has supported Whiskers in any way—whether by adopting a cat, attending a fundraiser, sharing our social media posts, or simply spreading the word about our work—thank you. Your belief in our mission inspires us every day and reminds us that together, we can make a difference.



# Financial Overview

In 2024, Whiskers generated \$679,287 in revenue and spent \$335,910, resulting in net operating revenue of \$343,377. The Shelter Kickstart campaign to raise money toward the purchase of a new shelter has been a major focus of our fundraising efforts this year.

## Revenue Highlights:

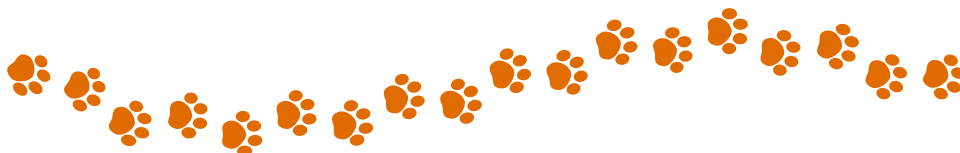
- Donations & Grants: \$320,924
- Estates: \$200,250
- Fundraisers: \$102,908
- Adoption Fees: \$42,995
- Investment Income: \$12,210

## Expenditure Highlights:

- Shelter Program: \$116,739
- Foster Programs: \$174,849
- Fundraising Expenses: \$34,354
- Administrative/Other: \$9,968



Cashew



# Cinco de Meow Spring Gala

## Save the Date!

Join us on Thursday, May 8, 2025, at the Italian American Community Center in Albany, NY, for a night of fun, food, and fundraising. Enjoy a festive buffet, raffles, and a live auction—all to benefit the cats in our care.

Visit [www.ewhiskers.com/2025gala](http://www.ewhiskers.com/2025gala) for tickets and sponsorship opportunities. Help us continue our life-saving work!



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