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## Families must choose between pets and homes

### Bad tenants blamed for problem

**Chuck Chiang, Calgary Herald**

Published:Â Saturday, October 11, 2008

Friday is a black, two-and-a-half-year-old shorthair domestic cat.

Unlike other cats at Calgary's Humane Society, he hides under blankets all day inside his kennel, shunning human contact.

When society volunteers remove him from his refuge, Friday squirms nervously, shying away from human faces before jumping back in and going into hiding again.



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"He just hides under there," says Lindsay Jones, the society's communications and marketing manager. "He's older and he was with his family quite a bit longer than the other cats."

That family was forced to give Friday up to the shelter because they could not finding housing that allows pets -- an increasingly common scenario in Calgary's housing crunch.

The society estimates that they've taken in more than 3,000 animals from similar cases in the last two years, a period when the city's population boom caused record-low housing inventory in the city.

With the housing market still tight, people looking for a property that would allow pets are finding the task increasingly difficult because many condos forbid pet ownership.

Pet owners are forced to choose between having a pet and having a home, say society officials.

"We see a lot of tears because these pets are often beloved family members," says society executive director Patricia Cameron. "While some pets adapt, others have long memories and you can see them start declining."

Pets aren't often popular with landlords and condo corporations because of the damage the animals can cause.

Westgate Park, on the city's west side, recently said it will disallow pet owners from moving in, citing potential damage to balconies and lawns.

Gerry Baxter, executive director of the Calgary Apartment Association, says many landlords may have had previous bad experiences with pet owners renting their units.

"The biggest fear is the damage that can be caused," says Baxter. "We know there are a number of pretty irresponsible people who don't control their pets -- and that makes it difficult for responsible pet owners to find something."

Another reason for pet-free buildings, says Baxter, is that some prefer to maintain an allergen-free environment for residents who may have respiratory illnesses and may be sensitive to pet hair.

There is currently a law in Ontario that prevents landlords from discriminating against potential tenants who have pets.

It prevents landlords from evicting a tenant on the sole cause of having a pet if the animal isn't causing any problems.

A number of companies have started up in the country -- including one in Calgary -- that create "resumes" for pets.

The idea is to give responsible pet owners a third-party verified document that they can show to a landlord about the animal, increasing the pet owners' chances of achieving tenancy.

"Good pet owners make great tenants," says Candace Carnie, who created Calgary-based Prefurred Tenant Resume with colleague Irene Nielsen. "Unfortunately, landlords will not necessarily see it that way, so we're here to provide that bridge."

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