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## Reno's 1st cat café, Enchanted, battles financial woes while clawing toward 1st anniversary

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Reno's only cat lounge is a sanctuary from the world.

It's a soft space with pillows, well-worn bean bag chairs and blankets draped on rounded-back chairs of pink and gray. Beneath the plastic boughs of a large artificial tree is a cream-colored loveseat.

A furry creature flits across your periphery and drops into your lap.

Another snuggles in the crook of your arm.

Bordered by squat hills of sagebrush in South Reno, the Enchanted Cat Café has been a cozy stopover for forsaken cats on the journey from shelter to forever home.

As a for-profit business, however, the café has struggled to find its footing.

Endless maintenance costs, tight profit margins and an unorthodox business model have led to financial pressures that threaten to shutter the café only months shy of its first anniversary in January.

But Enchanted's new boss, 26-year-old Kallie Laity, believes in the redemptive power of loving animals — and a loyal clan of local cat lovers she hopes will help the café survive.

**See inside:** Grab some coffee and kitty cuddles at Reno's first cat café

## Bored and lonely? Get a cat business

Laity was a recent graduate with a degree in Spanish and psychology — and a lot of pandemic-related boredom — when she finally tired of the homebody lifestyle she had settled into during COVID-19.

So, like an animal lover might do, Laity began working at a cat café.

And then she bought it.

In July, Laity bought Enchanted from its founders, Devin Sizemore and Haley Meadows, an engaged couple whose feline-focused business was inspired by a viral YouTube video and a few fact-finding trips to West Coast cat cafes.

A few months later, in early January, the partners opened Enchanted inside a suite at 8555 Double R Blvd., an office park served mainly by two-lane roads blowing past a shrubby expanse of desert.

The location was hardly ideal for attracting curious passersby.

The cat café concept — part pet rental service, part coffeeshop — originated in Taiwan in the late '90s and has since gained popularity throughout Asia. Cat cafés now sit in the ranks of other curious coffee venues found there, such as human cuddle cafés and ninja-themed tea houses.

## Inside Reno's first cat café

Entering Enchanted, visitors find assorted candies peeking from behind a glass case alongside chilled drinks, baked goods, coffee creamer pump-bottles, posters and cat-themed trinkets.

With a few small tables and chairs scattered about, the space would feel almost like a community center — if not for the small peek windows in the back wall for stealing glimpses into the cats' domain.

City departments were at first stumped on how to handle licensing for Reno's first cat café. Eventually, Enchanted was granted a grocery permit, which let the business sell coffee and single-serve food items, much like a convenience store or gas station.

Enchanted is prohibited from making its own food, but the café offers various goodies and other baked goods provided by local distributors.

The real draw to the café is up-close-and-personal cat time.

## How it works

Visitors can pay \$15 per hour, or purchase \$45 monthly memberships, to spend time with the animals in a dedicated lounge separate from the café.

The café so far has nine monthly members, according to Laity. The café also offers corporate memberships but, until now, none have signed on.

Laity dotes on devoted regulars, who form an essential part of the business and culture.

"One is a teacher who comes to read and relax with the kitties," Laity said. "We have a couple who adopted from us who is here at least twice a week to get a snack, hangout with the cats and give me updates on their kitty Toby."

In the end, all the cafe's human trappings — the coffees, kitty cookies and cat time — serve the animals. Above all, Enchanted's purpose is find forever homes for the cats, who are provided by the Nevada Humane Society, a nonprofit no-kill shelter.

"It's not my goal to get rich off this," Laity said. "My main goal is the welfare of the kitties."

The café can accommodate up to 18 animals at a time, but it's rare for the space to reach max occupancy. Since opening in January, Enchanted has facilitated 113 adoptions — about 12 per month — including 59 during Laity's ownership.

Roughly \$3,220 in donations collected in the café have gone to animal rescue organizations and just under 6,000 drinks have been served, according to a running tally on the cafe's website.

## **For the cats, not the coin**

Enchanted's quest for revenue to cover operating expenses have put a strain on its humanitarian efforts.

A Reno native who had graduated college with the goal of becoming a bilingual counselor, Laity took the café job at Enchanted in March as a way to stave off the work-from-home doldrums that seemed to be swallowing up her life and stamping out her passions.

Laity, before taking ownership of the café, was one of the few employees Enchanted Cat Café had. Working alongside Sizemore and Meadows, Laity poured drip coffees, dished out pre-packed pastries and led small cohorts of serenity-seekers through Enchanted Cat yoga, one of the cafe's ancillary revenue streams.

Six months after starting the business, Sizemore and Meadows wanted out.

The couple agreed to sell the business to their former employee for \$80,000, plus monthly interest. Regardless of what happens to the business, Laity will be on the hook for that sum, with interest.

The time and money required to do such humanitarian work, she said, is staggering.

Laity cares for seven cats of her own. Four of them are permanent residents of the café, where she works around 70 hours a week to complete essential duties, often with the help of her mother, who volunteers as often as she can.

## Clawing forward

The café space costs about \$4,000 per month. Vet bills, food, cleaning supplies, toys and enrichment for dozens of cats, coming and going every month, typically requires another \$1,500 each month.

Over the last quarter, Laity has dipped into personal savings and scrounged start-up capital wherever possible. The short-term plan, she said, is "to give a push" to nudge the café towards its first anniversary in January.

Beyond that, she said, who knows?

"I try not to think about if something bad happens," Laity said. "[The café] has been everything I've wanted and more. I want to do this until the day I die."

*Editor's note: This story has been updated to correct information on memberships, food offerings at the café and when Laity purchased the business.*

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