

East-end B&B the cat's meow

By **RENNIE MacKENZIE**
Ottawa Sun

Let's be blunt about this. Melanie Walker is running a cat house.

Sure, she bills it as a bed and breakfast operation. But the front door is always locked. And pretty soon her slinky occupants are going to be visible on live action webcams 24 hours a day.

There is, however, nothing notorious about this "madame's" business. Her two-storey Pet Bed and Breakfast in the Canotek business park really is devoted to furry felines of all shapes, sizes and colours.

Travellers and vacationers have been dropping their cats off at Walker's boarding facility since December 2001, comfortable with the fact that their pets will be at home in her unique, cageless environment.

Kitties roam free

Outdoor cats roam free through the downstairs of the unit, climbing carpeted posts, walking along bridges and through multi-level "townhouses" patterned after the quaint, narrow homes of Amsterdam that so captivated Walker on a trip.

It's because the cats are free to wander that the entrance is always locked.

Indoor critters have the upstairs to themselves. It's created in a homestyle environment with living room tables and chairs and kitchen counters where a kitty can curl up in silence and darkness for a few hours. Walker has cut holes between the sections of counter to allow the cats to wander through.

For the cranky types that might disrupt

group areas, and for the infirm and those with special diets, Walker has several spacious, individual rooms on the main level.

This committed entrepreneur worked a long and circuitous route before settling on the Pet Bed and Breakfast concept. Over the last 15 years, she's been a caterer, convenience store owner, office manager, financial planner and home renovator.

But it was the Metcalfe-area farm girl's love for animals that drew her into the pet-sitting business.

In 2000, she began visiting east-end homes to care for pets while their owners were away. But she found she was making 15 or more stops and travelling 400-500 km a day to meet the needs of clients. And she was turning down callers.

It was then that she realized that if she opened a boarding facility for cats and other small animals (no dogs please) that she could expand her client base.

Walker's bed and breakfast can accommodate up to 50 cats at \$15 per night for two weeks. If more than one cat is boarded, the price drops to \$12 each.

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Small Facts

COMPANY: Pet Bed and Breakfast

FOUNDER: Melanie Walker

WEBSITE: www.petbedandbreakfast.ca

ESTABLISHED: December 2001

EMPLOYEES: 1 full-time, 2 part-time



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PET BED AND BREAKFAST owner Melanie Walker serves treats for Boo Boo, left, and Spunky at her establishment in the Canotek business park.