

Mews + Brews Cat Cafe-serving smiles and saving lives

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Cait Cox is Summerville's newest dealer, and based on the wild popularity of cat memes and videos living on social media, her product might be just as addictive as the hard stuff. The biggest difference? What Cait pushes saves lives-and I don't mean just the cats'.

"I always joke that I'm the local cat dealer," Cat laughed as she sat beside me on a vintage couch inside Summerville's very first cat cafe, Mews + Brews. An Aiken native who studied political science and art history (along with a concentration in Russian language) at the College of Charleston, the vibrant entrepreneur is a life-long animal lover who discovered her love of cats post-grad.

"When I graduated from college I wanted a pet, but I knew that I wouldn't be able to take care of a puppy. So, I ended up adopting my first cat. Then about a year after that, because I was bartending and working late, I wanted to get him a friend because I felt like he was lonely."

Although Cait felt that Mitsuki (a purebred Maine Coon cat) and Neko (who was found inside the wall of a historic home in downtown Charleston and bottle raised by Cait) fit her lifestyle without causing overwhelm, she found herself longing to adopt another cat.

The question became, "How can I have more cats without actually having more cats?" The answer-becoming the owner of a cat cafe.

COFFEE SHOPS, CATS, AND HEALTHY, HAPPY HUMANS

Cait's introduction to the concept came from a travel blog video she'd watched during college in which the creator visited a cat cafe during a trip to Japan.

"At the time I thought it was just a thing in Japan," she recalled. "I didn't think it was worldwide yet. But then the one in downtown Charleston opened, and I heard about the one in Atlanta, Java Cats. Then there's one up in New York that I started following. I thought it was the coolest idea ever, and I was always joking that one day when I retired I would open a cat cafe."

Why have cats in a cafe? Yes, they're cute, and the world loves a good cat video-but studies have shown that interaction with the creatures has some very specific mental and physical health benefits. The National Institutes of Health reports that time spent with pets (not just cats) can have a positive impact on human stress levels by helping to reduce cortisol and blood pressure. This may in turn help lower the risk of heart-disease, which as we all know, is one of the leading causes of death in the United States. Studies have also shown that a cat's purr, which falls between the range of 20-140 HZ, also fits within a range of frequencies that may be

able to impact human joints, muscles, and bones in a therapeutic way. A 2002 study by the National Institutes of Health even pointed toward evidence that proved children under a year old who spent time with a cat were less likely to develop other allergies in the future.

The physical benefits of spending time with a friendly cat are great, but the mental and emotional benefits can truly change lives. Interaction with cats at a local cat cafe can be a wonderful way to alleviate feelings of loneliness and depression in those who may not be able to have a pet in their home. At a cafe like Mews + Brews, there are no dishes and laundry waiting, nor the deafening silence of a house that no longer contains a loved one. Patrons can find companionship and solace in sitting quietly with the kitties, or rekindle laughter that has been lost as they watch their antics. It's a win-win situation, for both the felines and their human visitors.

DIVING IN, PAW-FIRST

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic proved to be the jumping-off point for Cait's idea. With a bounty of extra time on her hands, she dove into doing research, talking to other entrepreneurs and business owners to glean their best advice, and writing a business plan for her future cafe. Cait then launched a Kickstarter in 2022, which helped fund Mews + Brews' opening expenses.

There was one piece of the puzzle missing before Cait could make her dream a reality-where would Mews + Brews call home? Although she loved Charleston, the tenacious entrepreneur set her sights on Summerville.

"I just feel like Summerville is growing really fast in the downtown area," she explained. "It has so many cute bars and restaurants popping up that I kind of wanted to add something to diversify the things that people could do here. It's going to expand even more over the next five years, and to have something this unique and different that people can go do (that isn't just your typical restaurant or bar) is pretty neat, I think."

Cait spent some time talking to a number of Dorchester County officials prior to beginning her search for a space, in an effort to ensure that Summerville would be open to a cat cafe. After receiving the go-ahead from the proper entities her search began in earnest, and as luck would have it she found the perfect location with amazingly supportive landlords. It needed some work, but before long Mews + Brews' physical location in Knightsville took on a character all its own-a product of Cait's vision for the business and her own personal style. The business opened its doors to the public in January of 2023.

The space contained within the walls of the 100-plus year-old building has a vibe that's a little bit retro, with a drizzle of contemporary chic and a heaping spoonful of cozy. Inviting seating areas, a fully-stocked bookshelf, and a smattering of cat toys and board games provide the perfect place for visitors to indulge in interaction with the cafe's four-legged "employees" after stepping into the separate bar/lounge area to grab a coffee drink, wine, or craft beer.

“It feels like home,” Cait said with a smile. “It feels like you’re visiting someone’s living room, which is the vibe I wanted.”

The cats that call Mews + Brews “home” (until they find their forever home, of course) begin as residents of Dorchester Paws, the only open-admission shelter in Dorchester County. Before joining the team, the cats are health and personality tested to ensure the safety of customers and the other feline residents. The cafe strives to keep around ten cats at all times, freeing up valuable space at the shelter for other animals in need and acting as a liaison between them and potential adopters.

“The shelter was at maximum capacity for over a year before we opened,” Cait explained. “Our main goal was to make sure that they could free up enough space to help new animals, and we could provide a place for the animals to have a positive environment. Here they’re getting socialized and taken care of, and having more space helps the cats be less stressed and really show their personality.”

SAVING LIVES, ONE SIP AT A TIME

At the time of our interview, Mews + Brews had helped 123 cats find loving homes as a result of their time at the cafe. Polaroid pictures of each are posted proudly on the wall by the entryway, a testament to the power this little house of cats and coffee holds.

Visitors to the cafe are encouraged to make a reservation, which can be done via Mews + Brews’ website. During regular business hours guests must be 12 years or older, but “Kitty Play Dates” are scheduled by the cafe several times per month for younger visitors. Mews + Brews also hosts a variety of unique events, including cat yoga, drag bingo, craft nights, trivia nights, and special activities geared toward children. Information on all of these events can be found on the cafe’s website and social media channels.

Cait is proud of what her vision for Mews + Brews has grown into in their first seven months of business, and looks to the future with hopes of not only continuing the Summerville location’s record of success but perhaps adding cafes in the Columbia and Greenville areas. If you find yourself looking for a feel-good outing, don’t hesitate to stop by and see what all the buzz is about. You might just find yourself on the “wall of fame” with a new friend.

For more information, visit www.mewsandbrewscatcafe.com on the web, or find Cait and the crew on Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram @mewsandbrewscafe. You can also call 843-926-6886 with any questions, or to make a reservation to visit the cafe.