



Junior Violet Newton eats chicken noodle soup, a meal commonly referred to as a comfort food. (Photo by Faith Smith)

THE STORY BEHIND COMFORT

by Cheyenne Steed
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Comfort food can play a major part in most people's lives, it can be viewed as something that brings happy memories of childhood, make some people feel good, and also could possibly benefit mental health. Comfort foods can help produce a chemical messenger called dopamine which is released in your brain when you feel any type of pleasure.

"My comfort food would probably be ramen noodles, specifically the chicken ones. I like that it's warm and I like the taste," junior Luis Torres said. "Sometimes it's comforting to eat something warm, I probably eat ramen noodles a couple of times a month, maybe every other week."

A large percentage of people have comfort foods, some people even claimed they gained this comfort food from their parents cooking, or something their family has passed down.

"My comfort food is kind of random but it's my mom's homemade cheesy chicken and rice and I like that my mom doesn't make it much and when she does it's more like a surprise," freshman Payton Baker says.

Comfort foods can also be extremely beneficial to one's mental health. According to an article on Vox.com by Raycheal Sugar, comfort foods can help relieve stress. Over time, people have learned that they actually dampen stress hormones.

"I like dill pickles because I like the flavor of it, they are non-fattening so I can eat as many as I want, it's filling, they come in jars so they are easy to carry around and the pickle juice is good to drink for you, they aren't expensive and they come with a good amount in each jar," sophomore Logan Upchurch said.



Learn More

Scan the QR code above to read an article about comfort foods in relation to mental health.

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At the Zen Cat Cafe, people can love and relax with the cats and find peace with a coffee. The cafe is a resource for stray cats to find a home with the cafe or other cat lovers. (Photos by Demi Johnson, Illustration by Izzy Lash)

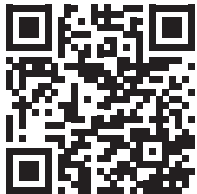
MORE INFO

Scan the QR codes below to find more information about Cat Zen Cafe.



Reservations

Scan the QR code above to find available reservations at the Cat Zen Cafe.



Visiting

Scan the QR code above to find important information about visiting the cafe.

FINDING A FOREVER HOME

Cat Zen Cafe and Lounge looks to find homes for cats and provide a calming environment for customers

by Drew Johnson
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For Tonya Williams, simply visiting shelters wasn't enough to advocate for animals. Using her background in social work, Williams applied what she knew about human hospitality to pet care and opened Cat Zen Cafe and Lounge on Main Street in St. Charles.

"I worked in that area [for] close to 20 years helping support people in the community and I've always had a love for cats and figured I wanted to switch gears and focus on helping cats find forever-loving homes, just like I've done in my profession as a social worker," Williams said.

Williams' cat hospitality differs from classic animal shelters. Unlike shelters, cats at the cafe are allowed to stay until they are adopted and are able to roam free in the cafe. Customers can interact with the cats for \$8.64 per half-hour or \$13.50 per hour.

"Sometimes it would be depressing seeing cats in metal cages looking very sad," Williams said. "But I know that shelters are doing the best that they can to help cats find homes and so after visiting a different cat cafe, that really inspired the idea to open one because it is an alternative to your typical cat adoption

facility or shelter."

Williams' approach to companionship has proven successful. Largely, the cafe averages about 10 adoptions per month.

"We actually just exceeded 100 adoptions," Williams said. "We're really excited about that."

Much of the success has been dependent on the cafe's vision to prioritize both the customer's satisfaction and the cat's comfort.

"We take a lot of pride in creating an aesthetic environment not only for our customers but for our cats," Williams said. "We're really big on making sure that our cats are happy, our customers are happy, providing optimal customer service, and really making sure that we have a team of staff and employees here that really care about the well-being of the cats."

With a large number of cats in the building, it can be challenging to care for each individually. Although the cafe is sometimes only a temporary home, employees like Josie Fenton still make an effort to ensure that all of the cats have the best experience possible.

"Honestly, we're just trying to make sure that cats that have been through not the best life, have the best life that they can have," Fenton said. "We're trying to make things better for as many cats as we can, as much as we can."

Cats in the cafe are picked in partnership with local rescue shelters to ensure that they will make a good fit for the cafe. Due to the number of people visiting them, energetic and friendly cats are often picked to be in the cafe.

"We work in partnership with our rescues," Williams said. "They know what this model looks like and what this environment is so they identify cats that are in their care that they think would be a good fit for the cat

Scan below to find a list of cats available for adoption



cafe. Obviously, if it's a cat that is extremely timid, extremely shy, or may not get along with other cats or people then that cat wouldn't necessarily be a good fit to come here. They do a personality check and then we work together to make sure that it's the right candidate."

Cats aren't the only ones taken care of in the cafe, people are too. Although food and beverages are served for patrons, none of it is made in the cafe. Prepackaged baked goods made locally by Sugar Bot Sweet Shop and Sugar and Slice are available for purchase along with a self-serve coffee bar. Due to its size, a kitchen is not able to fit in the cafe.

"We would love to expand so we can have a bigger space or to add a second location," Williams said. "In those locations, we would like to have a full kitchen where we can offer more food and drink selections."

The cafe also hosts a variety of special events including yoga, painting and arts and crafts.

"Depending on what it is, yoga, painting with cats, or if they're coming just to do arts and crafts, they're coming to do something fun, but in the company of cats, so it's a little different," Williams said. "You can sit down and paint on canvas and have a cat sitting in your lap or have a cat purring or rubbing against you. You don't get that at a typical place where you go and do those activities."

With a variety of unique events and activities, the employees hope that everyone can find a reason to visit the cafe.

"In general, I think it's great, especially if you like cats," Fenton said. "It's really good to come in and you'll feel a lot better afterward."



STEPS TO ADOPT A CAT

Below are four simple steps to follow when preparing to adopt a cat in the future (Illustration by Violet Newton)

