

City Room



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Playtime With Cats, at Any Distance

By ANNA JANE GROSSMAN



Ozler Muhammad/The New York Times

The Bideawee pet shelter in Manhattan has installed Web-based remote control toys that let cat lovers play with shelter cats over their computers.

While visiting her mother in Pennsylvania this month, Lauren Pytel, a 47-year-old high school English teacher who lives in Tudor City, found herself pining for her cats, Tiggles ap Caduet and Munchie Effexorov, and their recently deceased siblings, Claritin and Zolof.

"They're named for medications, because cats make you feel better," she said.

So to assuage her longing, late one night in her mother's house, she played with cats on the Internet.

Specifically, she played with three kittens that were up for adoption at Bideawee, a shelter on East 38th Street where Ms. Pytel volunteers.

Bideawee had just finished installing three iPetCompanions — remotely operated cat toys that are [maneuvered via the shelter's Web site](#). A webcam at the shelter shows the cats responding to the toys, which jiggle based on a computer user's mouse clicks. The remote playtime with felines has proven quite popular. Internet users are allowed up to two minutes to move the toys.

"I'm glad it's only two minutes, because otherwise I could do it all night," Ms. Pytel said. "It's addictive!"

After returning from Pennsylvania, Ms. Pytel was at the Bideawee shelter recently, standing at the glass window of the playroom that houses the iPetCompanion toys. Two gray kittens, Dexter and Mystique, were darting after a pink feather at the end of a wire sweeping across the floor like a windshield wiper in drag. After plotting an attack, they retreated to the litter box. Ms. Pytel cooed at an older cat who seemed unamused by pipe cleaners jostling on the end of a nearby mechanical arm. A camera in the corner, operated by some anonymous user, rotated to take it all in.

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