

BUSINESS BRIEFING

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UP THE LADDER

Vet gives care to cats in comfort of home

El Paso native says house calls let pets avoid traveling, help put nervous owners at ease

Cecilia Burnside knows cats. A lifelong animal lover, she was the "pet person" of her family growing up in El Paso.

Since she was a child, Burnside has wanted to be a veterinarian. Now 31, she has been a vet for about three years, and since February she has operated Cats Love Housecalls, offering primary vet care at clients' homes. "Cats are creatures of routines and don't travel well," she said. "My experience has been that cats are better behaved in the house-call scenario."

Salary range: \$35,000-\$80,000

Education: I have a bachelor's degree in biology from the University of California at Santa Cruz and a veterinary degree from Texas A&M University.

Work experience: I worked for about two years at The Cat Care Clinic, an all-cat practice in Orange County, Calif.

Job description: I provide primary care services such as exams, vaccinations, blood work, urinalyses, skin exams, behavior consultations, hospice care and more. I consult with other area veterinarians and make referrals to specialists.

I understand cats and know their demeanor, and cats can get so stressed out during traveling that they become paralyzed with fear. That's not good for the cat or the owner.

I create a calm environment in the home and use minimal restraint. I can gauge a cat's aggression and tolerance levels pretty quickly. I don't use sedatives, so if a cat is too aggressive, I refer the owner to another veterinarian.

I try to schedule appointments for 9

Since February, Cecilia Burnside, a veterinarian and lifelong animal lover, has operated Cats Love Housecalls, offering primary vet care at clients' homes.

Elena Grothe AMERICAN-STATESMAN

a.m., noon and 3 p.m., allowing for other visits and networking opportunities in between. I spend a lot of time talking with the owners and helping them feel at ease. I also make sure I fully understand the needs of the

client and offer advice.

Since launching in February, I have seen pets in 145 homes.

How I got this job: I moved back to Austin in January and knew that I wanted to be my own boss.

Mentors/role models: My parents, Pat Mora and Bill Burnside, and my stepdad, Vern Scarborough. They would never let me quit and have been very supportive in my endeavors. My former boss, Dr. Elaine Wexler-Mitchell, is an excellent cat practitioner and taught me a lot. Another is Dr. Jim Koschmann, my first vet in El Paso. He is just the sweetest man ever and has grown his practice from a one-doctor office to a multi-doctor vet practice.

Best work habit: The compassion I have. I really try to be understanding and respect what the client wants to do. I try to educate them on what's the best care, but ultimately, I have to go along with what they want.

Compassion is very important in this business because people love their pets dearly. Some vets can be very cold and talk down to clients. And nothing could be worse than making a person feel stupid or intimidate them for asking a question, which may prevent them from doing something dangerous.

Worst work habit: I'm working on learning the business side of running a business. My boyfriend, Brad Cason, is working on his MBA at Texas A&M University and has been helping me.

If you want a job like this: You need to have compassion. It's so important because sometimes you have to deal with cats who are very ill. It can be heartbreaking at times.

You also need to keep current in veterinary medicine, which constantly changes. Vets have to take continuing education courses to maintain licenses.

Don't hesitate to consult with other vets on issues; it helps you to provide the best care possible, which is everyone's ultimate goal.

— Interviewed by Ginger Cowles

