

Cat called hero

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Former stray woke owners to warn of 17th Street fire

OCEAN CITY — A year ago, Paisley was living on the streets of Atlantic City, caring for her five little kittens.

Last week, the former stray – part Calico and part Maine Coon – was lauded for waking her adopted humans to alert them of a raging fire across the street from their West 17th Street home.

Strong winds had fueled an early morning blaze at a lagoon-front duplex at 226 West 17th Street. Firefighters arrived to find flames coming through the roof of the second floor, in the rear of the structure.

“To me, she’s a hero,” said Trudy Dooley, who was awakened by the cats incessant nudging about 3:45 am on May 1. “Without her alerting me to the fire, I would not have woken up.”

“Paisley rarely gets into bed with us,” she said. “If she does, she usually just sleeps at the end of the bed, she’s not a cuddler. This time, she was right next to me, and she just kept pushing on me.”

Dooley said the cat annoyed her enough that she sat up, and something outside the window caught her eye.

“It looked like strobe lights, like a police car was outside,” she said. Her interest piqued, Dooley, who lives at 349 West 17th Street, got out of bed.

“I opened the shutters, and said ‘oh my God, there’s a house on fire, and no one is doing anything about it!’” she said.

It quickly dawned on her, she said, that no one but her knew the house was on fire.

“So I called 911, and the fire department was there within minutes,” she said. “They got there so fast I couldn’t believe it.”

While the duplex was vacant at the time, the home next door was not and the resident of that home was not aware of the fire, Dooley said. Firefighters quickly went into action and she said the neighbor evacuated his home.

As firefighters began a defensive operation to protect neighboring homes, using ladder trucks and hoses, Dooley said she watched, thinking about what might have been.

“We live in Delaware, this is a second home,” she said. “We had just gotten here the day before. What if we hadn’t come down? The street flooded and the people whose house had burned went home the day before.

“What if the cat hadn’t woken me up? Would anyone have noticed?” she asked. “The fire had to have been burning a long time before it went up through the roof.

“The neighbors and the people whose house burned came out and thanked us, everyone was so appreciative,” she said. “It made me feel good, to be able to help but it really was the cat waking me up.”

“I think she was frightened, she saw the light from the fire,” she said. “She was pushing and pushing, I think she would have gotten inside of me if she could have.”

Dooley adopted the cat through Mew to You, in the 900 block of Asbury Avenue. The store sells donated items for resale, with the proceeds going to help stray cats. The company running the store is known as Cape-Atlantic C.A.T.S., which stands for “Citizens Altering the Strays.” The store carries clothing, home decor and miscellaneous items.

The mission, said Dooley, who volunteers for the organization, is to save the lives of area cats and kittens through rescue, foster, trap-neuter-return, and to place them in caring, lifelong homes.

“We adopted Paisley in September,” said Dooley. “She’s furry, a sweet cat. CATS took her in; they found her on the streets with her five kittens.”

Dooley said Paisley was not the only hero on that windy, foggy morning. Firefighters, she said, did a phenomenal job extinguishing the two-alarm blaze.

The conditions made battling the fire very difficult, firefighters said after the blaze.

“They kept the fire from spreading,” she said. The second floor, which was being remodeled, is a total loss. “It could have been a disaster. I can’t say enough about the firefighters.

“They were here until at least 7:30 that morning, long after they put the fire out. The flames would pop up after they put it out. My neighbor went to Mallon’s and bought them some sticky buns. It was really amazing what they did.

“So many other homes could have caught on fire,” she said, if not for Paisley and the firefighters. “The firefighters were wonderful.”

Paisley, she said, is a humble feline and taking it all in stride. Dooley said she’s very happy she made the decision to adopt a stray cat. After all, the cat saved countless homes from disaster. She may even have saved lives.

“She’s a love,” she said.