

# Dogs lie down with cats for blessings at Mission San Luis

By Will Brown  
DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

Rare are the occasions when animals are blessed without later finding their way onto the dinner table.

Saturday was one of those occasions as dogs, cats, squirrels, caterpillars, rabbits, hawks and other animals were blessed at the fourth annual Blessing of the Animals at Mission San Luis.

The Catholic tradition of animal blessings dates to the 13th century in remembrance of St. Francis of Assisi, a who founded the Franciscan order, and who is the patron saint of animals and the environment. Historically, Oct. 4 is the date of St. Francis' feast, which remembers his life and works through deeds for animals.

"You learn a lot about people from the way they relate to their pets," said Father Robert Young, Tallahassee's only Franciscan priest, who conducted the blessings. "It's a good study in human nature, as well as animal nature."

Young has presided over the blessings at Mission San Luis since the beginning. He said other churches have started to bless animals since the mission revived the practice.

In all, about 450 people came not only to have their pets blessed but also to catch musical performances and get information on local organiza-

tions that advocate for animals.

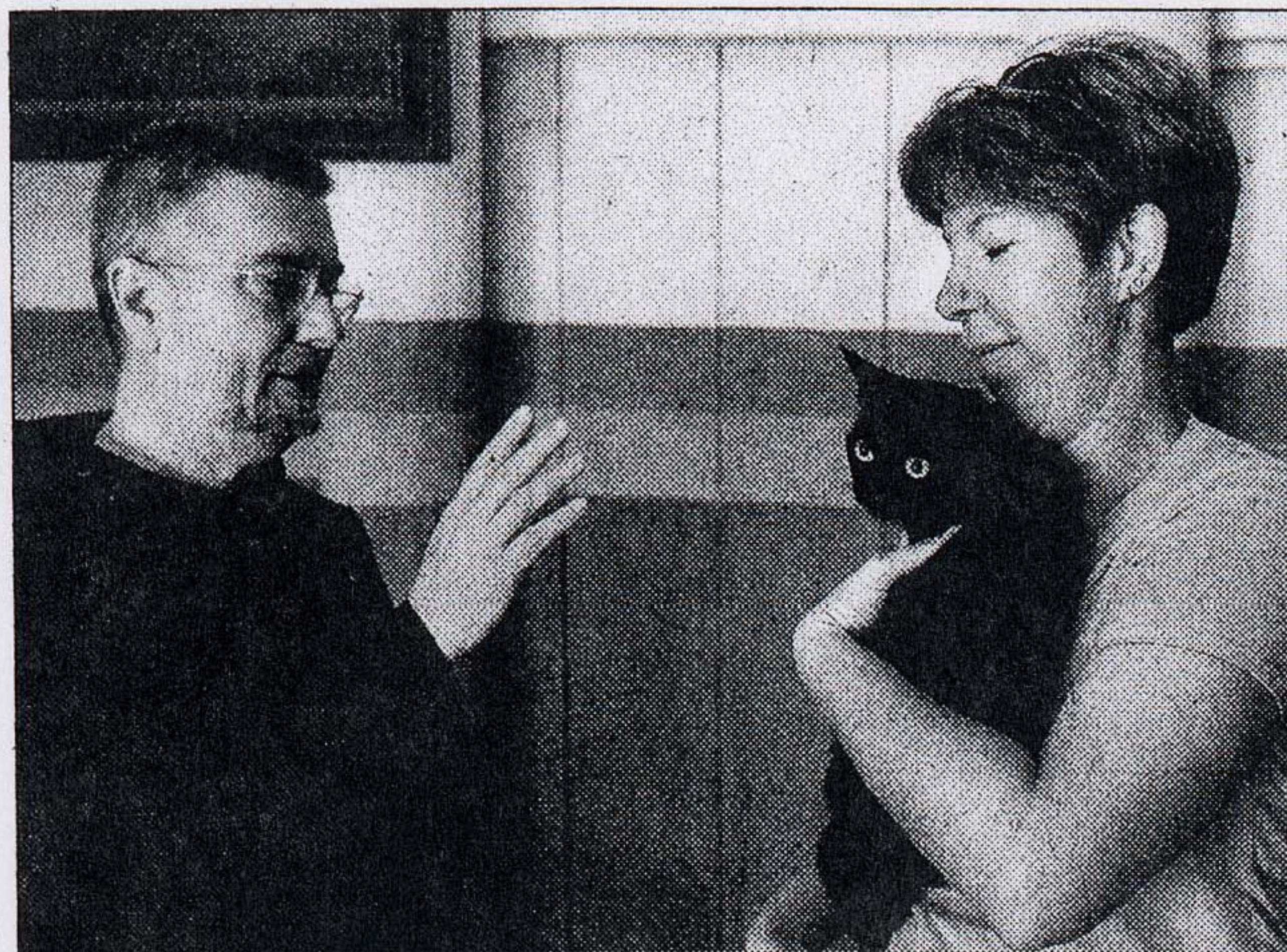
"We wanted to honor pets and the people that love them," said Jennifer Hoelsing, spokeswoman for Mission San Luis. "These groups do a wonderful service in our community, so it's nice to be able to commend those people."

Channing Combs was among those in attendance, along with her nine-week-old kitten Jasper. Combs found Jasper after he fell off a barn loft in Tennessee six weeks ago. Combs used the afternoon to acclimate her incredible small pet to other animals.

Young said many of the pets he blessed were like Jasper and either had a health issue or were trying to overcome circumstances that were not ideal for a pet. Nevertheless, the priest could not help but smile for most of the day during such a unique event.

Tallahassee resident George Brophy said his dog Jack is like him: both enjoy the company of people. Brophy spent the day introducing his thigh-high Great Dane to other dogs and people, hoping to encourage others to adopt a pet.

"Jack is already blessed — not that we couldn't use extra blessing — but Jack sleeps on a Ralph Lauren leather sofa, so he lives a good life," Brophy said.



Photos by MIKE EWEN/Democrat

At top left, Caryl Pierce holds her cat Samantha for a blessing during Saturday's fourth annual Blessing of the Animals at Mission San Luis. Franciscan Father Robert Young administered the blessings inside the mission church. St. Francis Wildlife showed their beautiful birds, and pet owners got to participate in hands-on art activities and see costumed living history on the grounds of the mission. At top right, an Alaskan Malamute named "Snow" is blessed. Above, "Jamaica" a handsome red-tailed hawk who cannot fly because a shotgun blast damaged his left wing. He was on display during the blessing. At left, Hahlan McKinney gets her Boston terriers ready.

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■ View a photo gallery of the blessing.

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