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## Student Design Team Gets The Message Across

By STEPHANIE SUMMERS  
COURANT STAFF WRITER

WINDHAM — Ashley Elliott's 6-year-old white Himalayan is an indoor cat. Abby does not walk on the wild side in Somers, where she dwells. Even if she did, she is spayed.

Abby is more of a Disney-style Aristocat. She is not like the members of feral cat colonies plaguing the city of Willimantic enough to spawn a new spay/neuter ordinance.

"She's afraid to go outside," Elliott says of her pet.

So Elliott, a 25-year-old senior in design at Eastern Connecticut State University, had to take a leap in her thinking when she created a billboard image to publicize the new local law, which states that all cats over the age of 6 months have to be altered unless the owner buys a breeder's license.

Elliott's design and those of three other seniors in the ESCU Design Group were installed on billboards around Willimantic on Thursday. Carrying the message "Windham Takes Responsibility," her cheery-colored work shows a band of cats frolicking in front of

Willimantic-like Victorian row houses. It's her first community design project and it is writ large on Bridge Street across from Mickey's Diner.

"Art is a good way to get a message across to people," Elliott says.

Her professor, June Bisantz, knows that very well. She has put her own artwork on everything from city buses to movie screens. Her current project will install feel-good images on backlit kiosks in New York's South Street Seaport shopping area next spring.

"Whenever I learn a new way to put images into a public space, I bring that

into the classroom," Bisantz says, showing students how to combine art with public service announcements.

Design Group projects have included billboards to promote the FrogFest art event and the 2005 reopening of the Willimantic Food Co-op, banners inside the juvenile court building and a logo for a regular podcast by Mansfield grade-school students. Now her students are deep into designing logos and brochures for the Willimantic Whitewater Partnership project, which seeks to connect

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## Students Spread The Word

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RICK HARTFORD/THE HARTFORD COURANT

ECSU STUDENTS show off their work: from left, Melissa Smith of Southbury, Thurmond Thigpen of Bridgeport, Ashley Elliott of Somers, Malachi Maynard of Canterbury, Ilana Kolodnicki of Montville, Jason Maloney of West Hartford, Lloyd Gevry of East Killingly and Bonin Curri of Hartford.

trails and greenways along the river.

In their project work, the students meet with the client, make notes, do research and then develop images, Bisantz says. They are not paid for their creations.

"They need the experience; the client needs the work," Bisantz says.

There is a competitive edge because only a few designs are chosen. Besides Elliott's, designs by Lloyd Gevry of East Killingly, Malachi Maynard of Canterbury and Ilana Kolodnicki of Montville are on billboards, posters and T-shirts sold on the CATS Northeast website to raise money for the cause. The other billboards are on routes 195, 32 and 66 on the edges of town.

Graduates have landed local design jobs at businesses such as Connecticut Magazine, ESPN, Stanley Works, Miranda Creative and Moroso motorsports products.

Bisantz says a lively graphics design community is growing in the state. "We want them to stay and become great right here."

In the case of the spay/neuter message, the client is Joan Lamont, animal activist and director of CATS Northeast. Lamont shepherded through the cat ordinance in Windham, as she did in

2006 in nearby Mansfield, the first town to pass such a law. Besides the neutering requirement, the law prohibits unaltered cats from roaming outside and restricts kitten giveaways.

Lamont is a committed cat rescuer trying to teach pet responsibility to the public, a greater challenge in an urban community. She is constantly seeking low-cost animal sterilization options, and now is working with veterinarians and volunteers to set up M\*A\*S\*H-like clinics in donated space.

The animal assistance forces in Windham are not like what you see on "Animal Cops." Lamont and some volunteers answer calls about feral cats and try to get them in for veterinary attention and neutering before the colonies get out of control. She claimed 50 of the \$40,000 in neutering vouchers released by the state last week but says, with easily 100 cats on the waiting list, they're all spoken for before she even gets them.

Lamont laughed when asked if there is a local Humane Society office or cat shelter, and relates a horror story.

"One colony that was reported as 12 cats was 24 by the time I got the funding to deal with it," she recounts. "Delays are costly. Lack

of action is costly. And those people were a bit anxious, as they bought their house not knowing they were getting a feral colony."

As the ordinance approached passage last spring, Lamont approached Bisantz to help educate the public about it. Bisantz, who calls Lamont "the saint of all animals," wanted to teach her students about the passion of community involvement, and the project was born.

"A professional design agency could not have gotten our message across any better," Lamont says of the Design Group's work. The project was also significantly supported by the Connecticut Humane Society and Bob Brown of Standish Johnson Advertising.

The class plans to go on a billboard road tour Tuesday. Elliott saw Gevry's and Kolodnicki's billboards on her way to and from class Thursday, but not her own.

"I thought it was really awesome to see something we worked so hard on on a large scale and in the public eye," she said.

For information about spaying and neutering cats in Windham County, call 860-942-9676, or visit [www.catsnortheast.org](http://www.catsnortheast.org).

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