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INSIDE RETAILING/Susan Chandler

The furs on display in these shops will be worn by pets, not people

Back in March, retailers along Oak Street and N. Michigan Avenue used their windows to promote works of art by students at the School of the Art Institute.

On Sunday, from noon until 5 p.m., they will be using their display space for an even warmer and fuzzier cause: animals from local pet shelters.

Yes, the homeless pets will be scampering around in the windows of such retailers as Pavillon, Christofle, Elements, Escada and Ralph Lauren. Participating shelters include The Animal Welfare League, Anti-Cruelty Society, Harmony House for Cats and the city pound.

Smitten window-shoppers may adopt an animal on the spot at Barneys or FAO Schwarz. The event has been organized by PAWS Chicago, a new non-profit dedicated to rescuing the estimated 40,000 animals that are euthanized in the Chicago area each year.

Paula Fasseas, a local banker who founded PAWS a few months ago, says Sunday's event is "not as much about adoption as it is raising awareness of the wonderful animals that are in shelters. They're not all mangy mutts with behavior problems."

Fasseas has been overwhelmed by the support she has received. Treasure Island donated cages. Ogilvy & Mather Chicago created promotional posters. And Ultimo Ltd. and the Armani boutique apologized for not being open on Sunday but requested posters for their windows.

And we never thought fancy clothes and puppies went together.

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Do more: More and more of us are racking up the miles—not just on our Mileage Plus Visa cards, but on home treadmills. Sales of treadmills rose 14 percent last year, pushing manufacturer sales to \$830 million. Those wholesale figures translate to about \$1.6 billion in consumer spending.

Treadmills are definitely in. Only 4.4 million Americans exercised on one back in 1987. That number exploded to 32.9 million by last year, according to annual surveys by American Sports Data Inc.

But home exercisers are a notoriously fickle crowd. Stair-climbing machines were once the hot choice. Sales peaked in 1993 at \$190 million, but have declined since to about \$115 million last year.

Those abdominal trainers had an even shorter shelf life. Sales plummeted 56 percent last year, to \$100 million from \$225 million in 1996.

Yet overall, sales of fitness equipment rose 9.8 percent in 1997 from 1996.

So how come Americans are still putting on weight? Perhaps if treadmill miles could be exchanged for a round trip to London, things would be different.

Party panic: Crate & Barrel's new flagship store in Lincoln Park was supposed to open in mid-May. But there were a few architectural changes, and the debut got pushed off until June 9.

That was bad news for Bette Kahn, Crate & Barrel's longtime, one-woman public relations machine. Throwing a party for a perfectionist like Crate & Barrel CEO Gordon Segal is always exciting. And Kahn had scheduled a trip to Paris to celebrate "a big, big birthday" after the tentative May opening date.

"She's still going, but now Kahn will be arriving home only a few days before the opening bash. "I'll just have heart failure when I come back. But I could not change my birthday," Kahn sighs.

Mall revival: The '90s have been tough on malls. First there was the recession. Then time-pressed, value-conscious consumers began shopping in guerrilla fashion, hitting only one or two stores before making a fast getaway.

But it appears mall shopping may be making a comeback.

Shoppers are spending about \$67 per mall visit, up 10 percent from last year, according to a survey by the International Council of Shopping Centers.

Not all mall retailers are benefiting equally. Home furnishing stores got the biggest boost, with sales up 2.6 percent per square foot. But apparel sales barely budged, up 0.8 percent.