

Harold Rains is the man behind the fur ball—make that Furball, the seventh annual fund-raising event for the Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon.

Rains, not a cat owner, was so moved by his two years spent working as the hospital administrator for Dove Lewis Emergency Animal Hospital in Northwest Portland that he wished to remain involved with animal activism even after he left to work for the Clark County Department of Community Services.

Rains and his partner, Donald Falk, moved to Portland in 1992 from Houston, where Rains worked for an oil company.

The former Texan who grew up on a farm became a vegetarian after a sympathetic encounter with a chicken on the freeway.

His first pet was a bull named Billy, who he says broke free from his pen to follow Rains to school.

"I've had pets all my life. It was natural to have an animal somewhere," Rains said.

As a boy, Rains called many a goose, squirrel, turtle and duck his friend.

Today he is a friend to cats with no owners.

"I saw an incredible need and felt that no animal should suffer. That's exactly what happens to feral cats. They suffer from diseases, injuries and lack of adequate shelter," said Rains.

He added, "In our society, cats are disposable."

A feral cat is either born in the wild or has become wild due to abandonment and lack of human contact. An estimated 500,000 cats are considered feral in the Portland area. According to the Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon, within seven years, one female feral cat and her litters will produce approximately 250,000 cats.

BEHIND THE FURBALL

Gay man organizes annual fund-raiser for Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon

by Jaymee R. Cuti

The solution, according to the organization, is sterilization. The Feral Cat Coalition is the only statewide spay-and-neuter program for feral cats. The group holds spay-and-neuter clinics throughout the state and in Vancouver, Wash., every Sunday. The clinics, which are free of charge, are run by volunteer vets and supporters.

Rains said he left Dove Lewis after two years because the job was getting expensive.

He frequently paid for the care of abandoned cats and found them homes.

"It became too difficult to see animals come in and know that there was nothing I could do about it. It also got very expensive taking care of the animals," he said.

Rains has been organizing the gay-positive Furball since the inaugural event seven years ago.

From the first fund-raiser, themed "What's Up, Pussycat," to this year's Furball, themed "Feline Groovy," the benefits promise rowdy fun. Past entertainers have included Pink Martini and Pepe and the Bottle Blondes.

Rains says the queer feel to the events is the result of his connections and compassion in the sexual minorities community.

"I tend to get the gay community involved. The gay community is a huge pet owner community because in most instances, we don't have children, so our animals are our children," he said.

City Commissioner Sam Adams, who lost



Furball organizer Harold Rains plays with his dog, Otto.

his 18-year-old cat, Mattie, last summer, is this year's honorary chairman. He has attended past Furballs and cites a great need for the coalition.

"The Humane Society does not spay and neuter cats that are not associated with an owner. This is the only organization that does that," Adams said. "If they didn't do their work, given the way that cats multiply, we'd have an

incredibly serious problem on our hands with wild cats in the city."

According to Adams, supporting the organization has been a longtime concern of the queer community. "I think it's because we're such excellent pet owners," he said.

The black-tie-optional event features a live and silent auction, a martini bar by Hood River Distillers and light snacks by Elephants Delicatessen.

Falk is an event sponsor every year.

"I couldn't do it without Donald's support—both emotional and financial support and his ideas," said Rains. "You get me, you get Donald." ☐

The seventh annual FURBALL is from 6 to 10:30 p.m. May 7 in Miller Hall at the World Forestry Center, 4033 S.W. Canyon Road. Tickets are \$75 in advance or \$90 at the door. For more information, visit www.feralcats.com.

Kindness to Fur Balls

The Oregon Humane Society asks Portlanders to observe Be Kind to Animals Week from May 1 to 7 by reflecting on the happiness and joy these companions bring to our lives.

The organization suggests showing your compassion by encouraging friends and family to spay or neuter their pets; spoiling pets with a new toy or treat; reporting animal abuse or neglect; keeping bird and squirrel feeders full; keeping identification tags on pets at all times; donating high-quality pet food to a shelter; and getting pets micro-chipped. For more ideas about how to help Portland's animals, visit www.oregonhumane.org.

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WITH MICHAEL KATZ



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