

CATS: Closest low-cost spay and neuter clinic is in the Tri-Cities

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cats in Hermiston. One of those individuals is Marie Johnson. She got involved in cat rescue a couple of years ago, when she found a litter of 13 kittens in her boyfriend’s truck. She was new in town, but when she asked around for help in finding the kittens a home she met Spiess. When she realized how overwhelmed places like Cat Utopia were she decided to do what she could to help. Working mostly through Facebook, she said she managed to find foster homes or facilitate the adoption of more than 100 kittens this summer. “I’m the crazy cat lady,” she said, shrugging. “I’ve embraced it” She also spends hours each week trapping adult cats for spaying and neutering through Cat Utopia’s

program and then releasing them back onto the streets. In the last year Cat Utopia altered 392 cats from Hermiston, while PAWS did 170 and Purrfection Crew did 150. Spiess said people are often surprised when Cat Utopia releases feral cats, but socializing an adult cat that didn’t grow up domesticated is a long process and releasing the cat back into its home territory will keep other cats from inevitably moving into the area. Spiess and Johnson have plenty of stories from their trapping adventures. Once someone called and said they thought they had a colony of about 40 cats on their property. Four days later volunteers had trapped 117 cats, all the same color. Another time Johnson brought home a feral cat that was recovering from surgery and found the trap empty the next morning.

Need help with a cat?

If you are looking for help finding a home for kittens, adopting a cat or getting an animal spayed/neutered the following organizations can help:
Cat Utopia (Pendleton): 541-278-1253
Humane Society of Eastern Oregon Pet Rescue (Hermiston): 541-564-6222
Purrfection Crew (Hermiston): 541-720-7162
PAWS (Pendleton): 541-276-0181
Fuzzballs (Stanfield): Contact via Fuzzballs Facebook page

A few days later she found the cat across town in her old territory. “The doors were shut,” Johnson said. “I still have no idea how she did it.” They have a few stories about human behavior too. Johnson said recently she found a Siamese cat that was clearly domesticated and asked around on Facebook if anyone was missing the cat. A man messaged her and told her that he had moved and couldn’t keep the cat so he

had let it go. “It’s not my problem anymore,” he told her. Spiess said it’s a common misconception that cats who were raised in a home their whole lives know how to hunt when suddenly left to fend for themselves. It’s not uncommon to pick up cats that are close to starvation, she said, but that doesn’t stop people from illegally abandoning them. “People are really bad about calling and saying ‘I

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— **Cindy Spiess,**
Cat Utopia director

need a home for these cats now,’ and we get threats that people are going to dump them, going to kill them if we don’t take them now,” Spiess said. She said right now the closest low-cost spay and neuter clinic is in the Tri-Cities, but Cat Utopia is shopping around for land in the Hermiston or Stanfield

area to build its own. Spiess and Johnson both said they could use help. They’re always looking for foster homes to take kittens for two weeks at a time before they are taken to the Oregon Humane Society, PetCo in the Tri-Cities or a local organization to be put up for adoption. But if that sounds like too much of a commitment, they said small things like going out and setting up traps, donating food or transporting a litter of kittens from Hermiston to Pendleton can be a huge help. The biggest help of all, of course, is being a responsible pet owner. “Please spay and neuter your cats,” Spiess said. “It comes down to a responsibility to your community.”

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DEBATE: ‘It was a wealth of information these young individuals had’

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or totalitarian government. Taelor Cruz and Katelyn Johnson won the debate, however, arguing that domestic surveillance was necessary to provide security and prevent terrorism. Johnson confidently explained that, because the NSA gathers its data from phone and Internet companies rather than the individual users, the Fourth Amendment is not violated. She said the companies collect and store the data and require their users to authorize the data collection through user agreements. Johnson said after the debate the, after researching both sides for months, she believes surveillance should be curtailed. “You kind of just have to forget about your opinions (to debate) and get into this state of what people believing in con would think, and you’re fighting for them, so it’s not really about what you believe personally,” she said. “It was difficult at first, but after a while, you just get into the mindset of this is what you have to do.” Beth Anderson, a former lawyer who teaches the class, said students learned the importance of researching both sides of an argument and understanding the opposing side. Learning to be persuasive, she said, is something that will benefit the students beyond their time in academia. “When I was in high school, I remember the only thing that really got me researching was when I had to debate in a government class against my peers,” she said. “I had a parent tell me, because they were tired of hearing their student complain about all the work for this class, that Dr. Anderson is preparing you not just for college, she’s preparing you for life.” Anderson said the National Forensic League chose the topic of domestic surveillance, which thousands of high school students will debate this year. In the second debate Tuesday evening, Valentino Whitesell and Vanessa Ambriz-Mendoza argued that the surveillance was illegal, an invasion of privacy and an ineffective and unnecessary means to combat terrorism. Whitesell cited a May 2015 court ruling stating the NSA’s programs were illegal, and Ambriz-Mendoza said the

surveillance failed to prevent the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing. Ellery Jones and Oscar Galdamez argued that the NSA’s surveillance was legal and protected both citizens’ privacy and safety. Jones said a more recent court ruling stated the surveillance was not illegal. In an impassioned monologue, Galdamez said it was better to be “safe rather than sorry” and that mistakes such as the Boston bombing should strengthen the resolve for surveillance programs. In the three-minute grand crossfire where all four debaters asked and responded to questions from the opposing side, Whitesell’s quick wit prevailed. He pointed out that Jones and Galdamez’s analogy of parents protecting their offspring likened citizens to children, and in the end, the side arguing for curtailment of domestic surveillance won the second debate. “It’s actually a pretty fun experience to get to be able to do this,” Whitesell said after the debate. “It taught me first and foremost, obviously, how to speak in front of all these people. That was kind of the toughest thing. And how to prepare all of these speeches.” School board member Karen Sherman, HHS speech and debate coach Nicole Kane, HHS assistant principal Jake Bacon and attorney George Anderson were the judges for the event. Sherman said the debate was a wonderful opportunity for the students and that they all performed well. “It was a wealth of information these young individuals had, and they all did a great job with delivery, so it was hard (to choose),” she said. George Anderson said competing in the final debates was an accomplishment in itself, though he recommended the students slow down, make more eye contact and practice using microphones. Debating is great for the students to practice, he said, because it touches on so many important skills. “You can go to school and you can learn about this and learn about that, but you’ve got to learn how to write what you mean, you’ve got to learn how to understand what you read and you’ve got to be able to speak what you think,” he said. “In the end, if you teach those three things, they’ll be OK.”

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