

Stray cats strut until cages shut

Rescuers fight to stay ahead of increasing cat population in Hermiston

By **JADE McDOWELL**
Staff Writer

For the network of people who are taking hundreds of stray cats off the streets in Hermiston each year, nothing is more frustrating than hearing someone say letting their cat roam free without being spayed or neutered is “no big deal.”

It is a big deal, Cat Utopia director Cindy Spiess said. It’s a big deal because cats can have three litters a year, meaning one male and one female can have 400,000 descendants in seven years.

“I don’t think the community at large has any idea the number of stray and abandoned animals here,” she said.

Cat Utopia is a Pendleton-based rescue, but Spiess said 60 percent of the 342 cats taken in by the organization during the last 12 months were from Hermiston. That doesn’t count hundreds more taken in by Pet Rescue, PAWS, Fuzzballs, the Purrfection Crew and a number of private individuals in a fight to slow the rising tide of feral and abandoned 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



Marie Johnson of Hermiston places water in a cat trap while setting traps at a home off of Baxter Road outside of Hermiston.

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. 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 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.”



Marie Johnson of Hermiston sets a cat trap at a residence off of Baxter Road east of Hermiston.

Hermiston Herald

VOLUME 109 • NUMBER 62

Gary L. West
Editor
gwest@hermistonherald.com
541-564-4532

Tammy Malgesini
Community Editor
tmalgesini@eastoregonian.com
541-564-4539

Sam Barbee
Sports Reporter
sbarbee@hermistonherald.com
541-564-4542

Kim La Plant
Multi-media Consultant
klaplant@hermistonherald.com
541-564-4530

Jade McDowell
Reporter
jmcowell@eastoregonian.com
541-564-4536

Sean Hart
Reporter
smhart@hermistonherald.com
541-564-4534

Jeanne Jewett
Multi-Media Consultant
jjewett@hermistonherald.com
541-564-4531

To contact the Hermiston Herald for news, advertising or subscription information:
• call 541-567-6457
• e-mail info@hermistonherald.com
• stop by our offices at 333 E. Main St.
• visit us online at: hermistonherald.com

The Hermiston Herald (USPS 242220, ISSN 8750-4782) is published weekly at Hermiston Herald, 333 E. Main St., Hermiston, OR 97838, (541) 567-6457, FAX (541) 567-1764.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES
Delivered by carrier and mail Wednesdays
Inside Umatilla/Morrow counties.....\$42.65
Outside Umatilla/Morrow counties.....\$53.90

Periodical postage paid at Hermiston, OR. Postmaster, send address changes to Hermiston Herald, 333 E. Main St., Hermiston, OR 97838.

Member of EO Media Group Copyright ©2015

HEALTHY FRIDAYS
Free health screenings: blood pressure checks, weigh ins, body mass index, cholesterol and glucose.
Every Third Friday of the Month
December 18 • 9:00 - 11:00am
GSMC Education Department

EARLY PREGNANCY
One FREE class focusing on the first six months of pregnancy. Healthcare professional speakers will provide presentations on topics that include medication use, exercise, diet, breastfeeding and many other helpful subjects. Free, but please pre-register.
December 10 • 6:30-8:30pm
GSMC Conference Room Center 2

BIRTHING CLASSES
Two-day course to prepare each mother and birth partner for a knowledgeable, rewarding and sharing childbirth experience.
December 11 & 12
Friday: 6:30 - 8:30 pm,
Saturday: 9:30 am - 3 pm
GSMC Conference Room

BREASTFEEDING CLASSES
One class covers breastfeeding benefits, pumping and much more. Come to this FREE class taught by a certified lactation consultant, and learn techniques that make for a successful experience. Free, but please pre-register.
December 2 • 12:00pm - 1:30pm
GSMC Conference Center 3 & 4

Working every day to promote a healthy community
GOOD SHEPHERD
HEALTH CARE SYSTEM
Education and Wellness Services 667-3509
For information or to register for a class, call (541) 667-3509 or email healthinfo@gshealth.org

STUDENT OF THE WEEK

Courtney Wheeler
HERMISTON HIGH SCHOOL
Not only is she an amazing student and person, but she is really doing a lot of peer teaching for my customer service unit. She is helping those who are struggling and setting a good example for others. 3.19 GPA
Proudly Sponsored by
Miller REALTY INC.
398 E Ridgeway
Hermiston, OR 97838
541-667-2000
1-877-668-6541
www.hermistonhomes.net

BLACK FRIDAY SALE

SPRINGFIELD ARMORY USA **XD**
XD9801HC XD9645HC XD9802HC
\$379.99 EACH

DPMS PANTHER ARMS
RFA3-OC
\$499.99

kershaw KNIVES
1098AU Blade Trader
\$21.99

LEATHERMAN
REV
\$21.99

Danner
Prong Horn Boots
\$89.99
45001

YETI HOPPER
15% OFF

SMITTY'S OUTPOST
EST 2014
1825 N. 1st St. • Hermiston, OR