

## In This Issue:

- Volunteer Opportunities
- Caring for a Feral Colony
- Ask the Vet... About Feline Leukemia
- Why "The Message Matters"
- Spotlight On... Harmony Laughlin

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Comments on the Scratching Post? Send ideas and suggestions to [cbiond@nc.rr.com](mailto:cbiond@nc.rr.com).

## All About Volunteers

### Looking for Matchmakers

Have you ever thought about helping the SHFC cats and kittens find the perfect homes? Because of our extended adoption hours during the week, there's a tremendous need for more adoption counselors.

If you're interested in getting involved in this rewarding activity, please contact Sherri at the shelter or at [info@safehavenforcats.org](mailto:info@safehavenforcats.org). Counselors are needed for both weekday and weekend shifts.

### Cleaning Captains Wanted

Cleaning captains are needed for the weekday cleaning shifts, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

A cleaning captain's main responsibilities are to work with Sherri or Pam to learn what needs to be done during the shift, to make sure supplies are available for the other volunteers, and to mentor new volunteers or pair them with an experienced volunteer. Contact Sherri if you're interested in this opportunity.

For insight into what one

cleaning captain thinks about her experiences at SAFE Haven, be sure to read *Spotlight On...Harmony Laughlin* on page 4.

### Kumar Takes 3<sup>rd</sup> Place!

A champion in our midst! Kumar, a big, friendly orange boy who came to the shelter with his sister Harriet, took third prize at the Heaviest Cat Contest at Pet Supplies Plus in the Aldi Shopping Center on Wake Forest Road.



The competition was stiff – first place topped the scales at a regal 30 pounds, second place weighed in at 28 pounds and Kumar took third at 25.12 pounds. Looks like those treats Kumar gets for being such a good boy are paying off!

Volunteer Janet Hensel escorted Kumar to the competition, and said he did just great. All participating cats were given a toy and a package of treats (which Kumar was not allowed to consume immediately). The three winners will receive food and litter for a year!

### Mutt Strutt

SHFC will be participating in this year's Mutt Strutt, an event sponsored by the Wake County Animal Care, Control and Adoption Center to bring attention to rabies and pet overpopulation.

This event will be held on Saturday, Nov. 7, from 10 am to 2 pm. If you can be SHFC's ambassador at this event, please contact Sherri at the shelter.

### Holiday Gift Wrapping

There will be *many* opportunities to volunteer for holiday gift wrapping this year! If you'd like to help and have not received an e-mail about it, please contact WRay at [safehavenvol@aol.com](mailto:safehavenvol@aol.com).



This is Billie Holiday, investigating her toy. Billie has feline leukemia, but with a quiet home and good nutrition she's got many happy days in front of her. If you have a lap for this darling cat, please contact Sherri or Pam at the shelter!



Save the Date!

Next Year's  
*Tuxedo Cat Ball*

April 16, 2010

## Caring for a Feral Colony

*Kim, a SHFC volunteer, has been caring for feral cats in her backyard for a number of years. I asked her to tell us how she and her husband got involved in caring for their feral colony.*

About five years ago a beautiful tuxedo cat decided to have seven kittens on the ground under our picnic table as we were getting ready to go on vacation – quite a surprise! Hubby and I quickly realized that the mother, whom we named Louise, was afraid of humans, so in order to make her more comfortable, Hubby converted the picnic table into a raised shelter.

Hubby's sister has worked in the animal world for many years and began educating us about feral cats. She suggested that we begin scheduled feedings for Louise. One evening while I was putting food out I peeked in to check on the kittens. Lo and behold, there was another tuxedo cat lying on the blanket with the kittens – a male. Knowing what was going to happen if we let nature take its course, we began learning about spaying and neutering of ferals, and about resources available to their caregivers.

Louise and her friend eventually went to live with my sister-in-law, who has a barn they could live in. What we didn't know was that removing the two ferals would open up space for more to come (the aptly-named vacuum effect). Our existing feral colony began with another male tuxedo, Ed.

Ed is a gentle giant and the senior feral, and the others follow his lead. Every day he gets head-bonked as he makes his way to the food. Ed is gentle with the other cats, but he is aggressive and will panic and attack when he feels trapped by humans.

The cats taught us so much in the past five years. Here's some of what we learned.

1. Patience. It took us about a month to get our new colony into a daily

routine of scheduled feedings. All ferals have to be food-motivated to live. (If you want to make ferals move on, remove their food source.) Initially we had a difficult time getting Ed and his friends to be there each day for feeding, and we realized they probably had a food source elsewhere. It was quite a challenge to locate that food source, and then there was much diplomacy in determining who was going to feed the cats.

2. How to humanely trap a cat. Back to point 1 – it takes a great deal of patience to wait for the cat to walk into the trap. And how frustrating when you realize you've trapped something other than the cat! (Possums always seem to get in the trap at least once. However, they're usually calm at being trapped – probably because they've just had a good meal of cat food.)

3. How to handle the cat once it's trapped. Hubby says this is the biggest challenge for him.

4. Spaying or neutering. I cannot emphasize enough how wonderful it is to have the SAFE Care Clinic, with Betsy and her staff, available to do spaying and neutering of ferals. Some vets are not equipped for ferals, and even if a vet is equipped, the expense of getting a colony cared for can be unbelievable.

5. How to care for the cat after spaying or neutering. To allow for some recovery time, we try to keep the animal in a cage for a day or two. That's not always easy!

6. Providing outdoor shelter for the cats. Hubby built several off-the-ground shelters, and we often feed the cats near or in their shelters. Winter time is a challenge, with cold temperatures and frozen water bowls. We've learned that straw is better than any cloth material to provide some insulation, since cloth tends to get wet and then freeze.

7. Monitoring the colony for sick or injured cats and re-trapping them. It's difficult to make sure the right cat gets the food with the medication in it. It's also a challenge to determine the amount of medication the cat needs.

8. Monitoring for new cats so the trap/spay/neuter can begin. When new cats show up, we try to determine if the cat is indeed feral, or if there's a possibility that the cat can be socialized. If we trap a new female, we immediately begin search for kittens.

9. Keeping accurate records is critical. You have to keep track of who's been spayed/neutered, each cat's weight at the time, rabies vaccinations, medications, etc. We monitor the cats for significant weight loss or gain, since weight change is a primary indicator of age-related or other problems. We've been very lucky in that none of our ferals has lost or gained significant weight so far, but Ed is about eight so we need to watch him closely.

10. Making sure money is spent wisely. The expense of a feral colony can sometimes be overwhelming. You have to prioritize and make sure critical needs are met first.

We believe that ferals are worthy of the same love and care as domesticated cats, just in a different environment, in a different way. A way that works for them. I have seen courage, perseverance, survival, co-existence, a love between them that will melt your heart, calmness, and patience; and also, panic, aggression, and fear when a human is near.

We care for them simply because we love them. They are part of our family, and they give back so much to us - we love them as much as we do our indoor cats.

For anyone interested in learning more about feral cats, there are two great websites that you can check out: Alley Cat Allies and Feral Cat Coalition.

## ASK THE VET ... *About Feline Leukemia*

by Betsy Pethick, D.V.M.

### What is Feline Leukemia virus?

Feline leukemia virus (FeLV) is a retrovirus, so named because of the way it behaves within infected cells. All retroviruses produce an enzyme which permits them to insert copies of their own genetic material into that of the cells they have infected.

### How common is the infection?

FeLV-infected cats are found world wide, but the prevalence of infection varies widely with age, health and environment. In the US, about 2 to 3% of all cats are infected with FeLV, the risk being higher in young, ill, and free roaming cats.

### How is it spread?

Cats persistently infected with FeLV serve as sources of infection. The virus is shed mainly through saliva and nasal secretions. Cat to cat transfer of virus may occur from a bite wound, through mutual grooming, and (less commonly) through the shared use of litter boxes and food dishes.

Transmission can also take place from mother to kitten, either before the kittens are born or during nursing. Once outside the cat's body, FeLV doesn't survive in the environment for more than a few hours.

### What does the virus do to a cat?

FeLV affects the cat's body in many ways. It can cause cancer, it may cause various blood disorders, and it may lead to a state of immune deficiency that hinders the cat's ability to fight other infections. This explains why signs of FeLV are so variable, and can range from chronic diarrhea to seizures.

### How is the infection diagnosed?

Two types of FeLV blood tests are in common use; the ELISA test and the IFA test. Each testing method has its strengths and weaknesses. In most cases, both tests are performed to help fully understand a cat's infection status.

### How are FeLV infected cats managed?

Once a cat is determined to be persistently infected with FeLV, it has a 97% chance of remaining so for life.

Management is based on proper nutrition, aggressive treatment of secondary infections, and avoidance of transmission to other cats.

### How long do infected cats live?

It is impossible to accurately predict the life expectancy of a cat infected with FeLV. Under ideal conditions, infected cats can live a normal life for many months. Unfortunately, most cats will succumb to a FeLV-related illness within two to three years of becoming infected.

### How can I keep my cat from becoming infected?

The only sure way is avoidance to exposure. Keep your cat indoors, don't integrate new cats into the household until they have tested FeLV-negative, or house FeLV-positive cats separately. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of vaccination with your veterinarian based on individual risk.

## The Message Matters!

Pam Miller and Sherri Orner recently attended the first ever US conference just for cats – The Feline Forum sponsored by PetSmart Charities. The forum was attended by 600 people from all over the country and represented shelters, spay/neuter clinics and rescue groups.

Why a conference just for cats? Because cats deserve as much respect and care as dogs do but they rarely get it! (Just for the record, everyone at SAFE Haven loves dogs too.) But the reality is that cats get less veterinary care than dogs do. Cats are euthanized in greater numbers, have less space in shelters, and are set free to "fend for themselves" more than their canine counterparts. Even the internet is not immune to this discrimination. Views of adoptable animals on UTube run 80%-20% dogs to cats!

There are also a number of myths, old wives tales and misconceptions about cats that make it harder to adopt them. Much of The Feline Forum helped shelter workers clearly and cleverly reframe messages about cats a more positive light. Here are some examples.

*For the cat who does not like other cats:*

I am all the cat you'll ever need.  
You have one lap and I am one cat.

*For black cats and kittens:*

Black is the new black.  
Black cats – always in style, always ready for love  
Cats, the elegant choice – elegant, refined, unique . . . just like you.

*(continued on page 4)*



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## Spotlight On...

**Harmony Laughlin**  
**Sunday Morning Co-Cleaning**  
**Captain**



*Harmony alternates cleaning captain duties during the Sunday morning cleaning shift*

Harmony was in between jobs and wanted to find some volunteer activities. She found SHFC on the internet, and was very impressed with the way SAFE Haven matches cats with potential adopters. Rather than just having the adopter walk down a wall of cats in cages, the adopter can interact with the cat in a room – she was very impressed with that, and in April of 2007 she began volunteering.

She started working the Sunday morning cleaning shift, and about a year ago Harmony was asked by Pam and Sherri if she'd be a co-cleaning captain for that shift. She and another volunteer, Tina Joyner, alternate cleaning captain duties.

Harmony says that her favorite thing about volunteering is reading Sherri's adoption e-mail on Sunday evenings, and picking out a cat whose cage she cleaned earlier that day who now has a home. She said that one Sunday all three cats that she cleaned were on the list!

Harmony also volunteers at the SPCA, although there she works with the dogs. Once or twice a week she goes over in the evening to let the dogs out for their

last run of the day. She started volunteering at the SPCA at the same time as SHFC, assuming that she'd be able to pick a favorite and focus on one of them, but it hasn't worked out that way. Often she's the only volunteer on an SPCA shift that should have four, so although it's an hour-long shift she sometimes spends additional time there.

As with her volunteering, Harmony shares her home with both cats and dogs. She adopted Max, a lab/chow mix, from the SPCA in 2004. Two of her cats, Nala and Crystal, came from Vermont, where she lived before moving back to North Carolina. The third cat came from

one of the first hoarder situations SHFC was involved in. Sophia is a petite, long-haired tortie with one orange leg and 3 brown/black legs, and she just wasn't getting any looks during her stay at SHFC. Harmony fostered her, and when she brought her back, Sophia got adopted! Unfortunately, the adopter brought her back almost immediately, and Harmony decided Sophia needed to be with her.

Harmony loves the warm, family environment at SHFC, and often thinks about how nice it would be if she didn't have to work and could volunteer all the time!

## The Message Matters!

*(continued from page 3)*

*Myth: Cats in shelters are sick, have behavior problems and are old.*  
 Cats are like fine wine, better with age.

Experience counts. (an older cat shown with a poster of Jimmy Carter, Mother Teresa and Paul Newman).

It's just a cold – you're the cure. (graphic – a cat with a box of Kleenex)

We all misbehave occasionally – nobody's perfect (with a picture of a cat and Paris Hilton)

*Myth: Cats don't fit into family life.*

Need a perfect nights sleep – adopt a cat (photo of a cat and person asleep together)

Lower your energy bills – (photo of a man watching football with a cat on his lap)

Get Connected – (photo of a cat on a laptop)

Your in-home entertainment center – (cat leaping or playing)

*Myth: Cats are wild and can take care of themselves.*

Photo of a cat looking into a house through a window with the caption "Not everyone is a happy camper – don't make your cat rough it."

*Myth: Even if you feed an outdoor cat you are not the owner and they are fine "out there."*

Photo of a cat, a car and a coyote with the caption, "If you don't claim him what will?"

*Myth: Cats are too independent.*

Not too needy or greedy.

Independent cats – all the love without the fuss.

Love with no strings attached.

*Myth: Cats shouldn't or won't wear a collar.*

You wouldn't leave your house naked would you?

My cat *does* like to wear a collar but won't carry a purse.

Dress for success.

As you can see from these wonderful campaigns there are many ways to communicate about cats in a fun and purposeful way. Let's all try to do this when we are in the shelter and speaking about our cats for adoption. I know they will appreciate not being stereotyped!