

Cat colony overtakes local mobile home park

By Jessica Heffner, Staff Writer

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MIDDLETOWN — When Barb Wehmann and Ed Lentz stepped into the mobile home park in Middletown that was said to be overrun with more than 125 cats, they didn't know what the expect.

Armed with 300 pounds of cat food and several carriers, the Springfield Twp. couple who run nonprofit group, Save Cats and Obliterate Over Population, or SCOOP, along with Cincinnati-based Cat-Tales Rescue visited the park Aug. 8 to assess the situation.

As they poured out canned food on platters, more than 30 curious cats came out in the sweltering sun for dinner along with several curious residents who have been watching over the animals dumped and abandoned at their park.

Resident Jerry Thompson said he has seen the cat population explode over the two years he has lived there. In the winter he will leave a box out on the porch for the felines to shelter in. His shed is often home to several cats.

"They don't hurt nobody," he said. "But they are everywhere, laying out. Sometimes I am afraid they are gonna get hurt."

Brenda Smith, who has lived in the park for four months, said she finds the cats to be a nuisance. "I don't wish them no harm, but if (residents) want them they can keep them in their house," she said. "There is no sense in letting them live outside here."

The Middletown trailer park is the largest group of cats SCOOP has ever considered helping.

When they were first contacted by the park manager, which asked not to be named in order to protect the cats, to assist with spaying and neutering, Wehmann suggested other organizations that might help.

But when weeks went by and no one stepped in, she decided to act.

"I couldn't sleep because I was worrying about it," she said. "I knew this was too much for us but I couldn't get it off my mind. I wanted to help."

More about SCOOP

Wehmann and Lentz started SCOOP six years ago after the couple were asked to help trap, spay and neuter a population of cats that had taken over an apartment building outside of Cincinnati.

"We didn't know about trap, neuter/spay, return. Our goal was to help them and we helped every

cat,” Lentz said.

Just spend five minutes in their home in Springfield Twp., and you’ll learn their level of dedication.

Spread out among the rooms and an enclosure built on their deck are 60 cats, each with a story of how they were sick or otherwise unadoptable. Some have feline AIDS, others heart conditions and still more just haven’t been lucky enough to find the right home.

“We form an attachment with them in about two seconds,” Wehmann said. “We trap them and we feel a great responsibility to them.”

It’s a job they complete lovingly and oftentimes at their own expense. Wehmann is “severely allergic” to cats, and has to be constantly medicated.

And while they hold fundraisers and receive several grants a year to trap cats and provide vouchers for those seeking spay/neuter assistance, Lentz said more is always needed.

The most heart-breaking part is when the couple has to turn cats away, and are unable to house them.

“There is no fairyland place to take all the cats,” Wehmann said. “The best thing is to keep them there and spay and neuter them.”

Taking action

With the assistance of Cat-Tales, The Scratching Post, and United Coalition for Animals, which will offer a discounted rate for spay/neuter procedures, SCOOP plans to trap, spay/neuter and release most of the population while other, friendlier cats and kittens will be put up for adoption.

At the request of the park owner and manager, SCOOP releases the cats back into the park once they are sterilized, vaccinated and microchipped. They also will be ear-tipped — when a sliver of a cat’s left ear is cut off as the universal sign of a feral spay/neuter.

With funds raised for the year already exhausted, Wehmann said the process could take several months to complete. Donations and volunteers are needed to help trap and care for cats.

“All you need are a couple females who have not been trapped and the problem starts all over again,” Wehmann said. “You really need to get every single cat.”

While most of the residents care for the animals — many cried when the kittens were taken away to be adopted — Wehmann said her goal is to spay and neuter as many as possible while protecting them from people who would do harm.

“The humane solution is to trap and release,” she said.

Such programs, like the one SCOOP is undertaking, could go a long way to control the cat over-population problems seen across the country.

With a female cat birthing an average of three litters a season — up to six kittens each litter that in turn are capable of reproducing as soon as three months — spaying one is like taking hundreds off the streets, said Meg Stephenson, executive director at Animal Friends Humane Society.

“You are just looking at this huge problem,” she said. “And if (people) are not taking time to spay and neuter cats, they are just adding to the problem.”

For more information on SCOOP or to donate or volunteer, call (513) 771-2967, e-mail email@scoopcat.org or visit scoopcat.org.

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