

# The Sedgwick-based nonprofit group will help to relocate 100 cats from a farm in Syracuse, Kan.

BY DIANE MCCARTNEY

## The Wichita Eagle

Ray Huff has been helping animals for most of his life, a calling he says he learned from his mother.

"My mother rescued cats as far back as I can remember," said Huff, 59, who grew up in Independence. "It's something you grow up doing and just continue doing."

That calling led Huff, now chief of police for the city of Sedgwick, to found Friends of Felines, a nonprofit group that works to improve the lives of stray and feral cats in south-central Kansas.

In 2003, Huff was faced with a decision on what to do about a colony of 23 cats that had become a nuisance in the city of Sedgwick.

"I started looking for a way to address the problem without the city having to expend dollars to do it," Huff said. He worked out a low-cost spay/neuter program with the Kansas Humane Society, and Friends of Felines "just kind of grew out of that," he said.

The all-volunteer group uses a method called TNR -- Trap, Neuter, Return -- to control populations of stray and feral cats.

With TNR, volunteers humanely capture wild cats, take them to a veterinarian to be spayed or neutered and vaccinated, and then return them to the site where they had been living, where volunteer caretakers provide food, shelter and medical attention.

A documentary about TNR efforts in Los Angeles, "Urban Rescuers," will be shown on PBS and KPTS, Channel 8, at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, with information about Friends of Felines following the program.

Friends of Felines volunteers care for 128 cats in five colonies scattered throughout Harvey and Sedgwick counties, and have used TNR to save about 300 cats over the past four years, Huff said.

Now the group is expanding its mission to help 100 cats living at a farm near Syracuse, in far western Kansas.

Jose Rheinscheld, a Texas woman, sought help for the cats when her ailing 97-year-old father, Lowell Stepp, had to leave his farm in northwest Stanton County to go into an assisted living arrangement.

"Her dad basically lived on that farm all his life and had fed these cats, and they just kept multiplying," Huff said.

Rheinscheld contacted Alley Cat Allies, a feral cat support group based in Maryland, and they asked Huff for help relocating the cats.

Phase One of what is being called The Syracuse Project will start May 4, when Huff and other Friends of Felines volunteers will trap about 40 of the farm cats, using self-closing traps baited with canned fish.

The next day, on May 5, veterinarians Al Collingwood of Johnson and Pam Howell of Pratt will spay and neuter the cats and provide any other needed medical care, including vaccinations.

Then on May 6, volunteers from as far away as Denver and Albuquerque will transport the cats to their new homes, managed colonies in Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico.

The whole process will be repeated with the remaining cats on later dates, once new relocation sites have been found, Huff said.

Huff is convinced that TNR is the most humane and effective way to control the feral cat population, estimated to be 60 million in the United States.

"I have yet to find any reasonable argument" against TNR, Huff said.

Wherever there's a food source -- a restaurant, convenience store or Dumpster outside an apartment complex -- "stray cats are going to congregate there," Huff said. "That's just a fact of life."

When the cats are eradicated, Huff said, a "vacuum effect" is created, meaning more unsterilized cats move in to take advantage of the food source. The new cats breed and multiply, and the eradication process has to be repeated all over again with a new group of cats.

But when the cats are neutered or spayed and then returned, "they will defend that territory and keep other cats from moving in there," Huff said. No new kittens are born, and the populations gradually decrease.

TNR proved successful with the first colony of cats in Sedgwick back in 2003, Huff said.

"I still take care of that colony. They're in fine health," he said. "They're all spayed or neutered, and there were no kittens born in that colony."

## HOW TO HELP

### FRIENDS OF FELINES

Friends of Felines, a nonprofit organization that works to improve the lives of stray and feral cats in south-central Kansas, needs donations, volunteers and relocation sites for cats.

To help or for more information, call 316-772-0329; e-mail [info@felinefriendsks.com](mailto:info@felinefriendsks.com); or go online to [www.felinefriendsks.com](http://www.felinefriendsks.com).

Donations can also be sent to: Friends of Felines, 717 N. Commercial, Sedgwick, KS 67135.

To read more about feral cats and trap-neuter-return programs, go online to:

- Alley Cat Allies, [www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org)
- Feral Cat Coalition, [www.feralcat.com](http://www.feralcat.com)

## IF YOU WATCH

### 'URBAN RESCUERS'

**What:** Documentary about animal welfare workers who use TNR \_ Trap, Neuter, Return \_ to manage feral cat colonies in Los Angeles, followed by information on Friends of Felines, a cat welfare group based in Sedgwick

**When:** 2:30 p.m. Sunday, PBS and KPTS, Channel 8

