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NEWS

Experts Urge Compassion and Common Sense for Outdoor Cats *Residents, Vets and City Officials among Attendees of McPherson Workshop*

(McPherson, KS) September 26 – Feral and stray cats were the stars of the show this past Sunday afternoon at the McPherson Opera House.

The national nonprofit organization Alley Cat Allies, along with Sedgwick-based Friends of Felines, held a workshop on September 23 for residents and animal control policymakers to talk about how to reduce the number of outdoor cats in the community.

Currently, most strays and ferals are caught and killed. The groups say this practice is expensive and doesn't work.

"When animal control catches a dozen strays, a dozen more will simply come and take their place," said Becky Robinson, president of Washington, D.C.-based Alley Cat Allies and a native of McPherson. "The single female cat who escapes being caught can go on to have as many as four litters of kittens in just one year. Catching cats to impound or kill them just feeds a vicious cycle."

The problem is especially true for feral cats, outdoor cats who are unsocialized to humans. Many area residents feed or care for these cats, who often live in family "colonies."

"Most of these cats can't be adopted, so taking them to an animal shelter makes no sense," said Ray Huff, founder of Friends of Felines and the chief of police for Sedgwick. "It is an enormous waste of resources."

Huff and Robinson addressed a crowd of about 30 residents from all around the Central Kansas area on Sunday afternoon, including three local veterinarians, McPherson city streets and utilities commissioner Michael B. Alkire, and officials from four area humane societies. Part of the talk focused on the benefits of an alternative called Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), in which stray and feral cats are humanely trapped by community volunteers, sterilized and vaccinated by veterinarians who participate in these programs, and returned to their colony. Cats and kittens who show an inclination to be friendly toward people are put up for adoption.

Robinson and Huff said studies show the TNR method to be more effective in reducing the number of strays and feral cats in alleyways and our backyards through attrition. “Sterilized cats can’t breed, so more kittens aren’t being born,” said Huff. “Spaying and neutering also ends annoying behaviors associated with cats in the neighborhood, like yowling and marking territory.”

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Huff founded his group, Friends of Felines, in 2003. The all-volunteer group has spayed and neutered over 300 cats in Sedgwick and surrounding areas, and several hundred more in surrounding states. Friends of Felines helps provide materials and training to local residents, recruits local veterinarians and buys vaccines in bulk for distribution to the vets. In 2006, the group was instrumental in the passage of a Sedgwick city proclamation supporting TNR.

Robinson – whose aunt, Mary Ann Robinson, founded McPherson’s first humane society – co-founded Alley Cat Allies in 1990. She was living in Washington, D.C. at the time and working on several animal rights issues when she began to recognize that the overwhelming number of animals being killed in shelters were feral cats, year after year. “I knew there had to be a better way,” she said.

Robinson discovered that several countries, including the United Kingdom and Denmark, have been implementing TNR for decades, with great success. Case studies on those countries show that it is less expensive and more effective to trap and neuter than to trap and kill, Robinson said. Several cities in the United States, including Washington, D.C., have used TNR to reduce the number of feral cats and have been pleased with the results.

“Counties and local municipalities would be well-served to recognize that it is a far better use of taxpayer resources to subsidize sterilization of all domestic animals, owned and unowned,” Robinson said. She noted that part of the purpose of the workshop was to encourage local residents to press lawmakers for a change in animal control policies.

“In essence, this issue is about our humanity. Humans are naturally empathetic and I think the overwhelming majority of us can’t sit back and let beautiful animals be put to death for no reason at all,” she said. “But it certainly speaks to the logic of TNR that it is the cheaper solution as well as the most humane.”

Huff added that the most difficult part of a TNR program is the recruitment of vets. “We’ve seen firsthand that people are more than willing to help when they have a fuller picture of the issue,” he said. “But Kansas does not have enough private-practice vets. We need the government’s support to truly make this work.”

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About Alley Cat Allies

The mission of Alley Cat Allies is to protect the lives and promote the wellbeing of the nation's population of feral and stray cats and to end the killing of cats in animal control pounds and shelters. Since 1990, Alley Cat Allies and its 150,000 supporters and volunteers have pursued this mission nationwide through educational, training and outreach programs, by providing veterinary care, sterilization and vaccinations, and by encouraging the policy of Trap-Neuter-Return to control reproduction of cats. Alley Cat Allies responds to more than 45,000 assistance requests a year and invites all members of the public to learn more about this critical societal need to "stop the killing." Please visit us at www.alleycat.org.