

Tornado kills 27 cats bound for new homes

BY DIANE MCCARTNEY

The Wichita Eagle

Twenty-seven feral cats that were being transported from a farm in Syracuse to be spayed and neutered in Pratt before going to new homes were killed in the Greensburg tornado.

Ray Huff of Friends of Felines, a cat welfare group based in Sedgwick, said he was driving a van and trailer carrying the cats the night of May 4 when he encountered heavy rain and large hail.

Huff and fellow volunteer Terry Gaul "pulled off the highway into Greensburg looking for a car wash or any business with a large overhang" where the cats, who were in cages and covered by a tarp, would be protected from the weather, Huff said.

"Three minutes after we hit town and parked, the tornado hit," he said.

The van, trailer and all 27 cats were destroyed, Huff said.

Huff and Gaul rode out the tornado in the van.

"We're beat up -- we've got some bruises and cuts and abrasions -- but other than that we're both very lucky," Huff said.

The cats were part of a group of about 100 that had been living on a farm in Syracuse, in far western Kansas, and needed new homes after their owner had to move into assisted living.

Veterinarians in Pratt and Johnson had offered to spay and neuter the cats, vaccinate them and treat them for parasites before volunteers were to take them to new homes in Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico.

The mission to rescue the cats -- dubbed the Syracuse Project -- was originally set for April 13 but had to be rescheduled because of a snowstorm in western Kansas.

Huff said they'll try again to relocate more of the cats on May 18.

"I've already started looking for another trailer and have ordered some traps," he said.

For more information about the project, or to see how you can help, go online to www.felinefriendsks.com.

Reach Diane McCartney at 316-268-6593 or dmccartney@wichitaeagle.com.

