

Program keeps cat population controlled

BY CHRISTINE BROUSSARD

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Dabbling first in feral felines roaming Nacogdoches car dealerships and grocery stores, Diana Hensley tested out a trap/neuter/return (TNR) program she read about in the national Alley Cat Allies newsletter almost 15 years ago.

Now, president and founder of the Nacogdoches O'Malley Alley Cat chapter, Hensley said the TNR program the chapter continues to offer is crucial in helping to keep the feral animal population down.

"After receiving and reading a newsletter from Alley Cat Allies ... I knew trap/neuter/return (not release) or TNR was the only humane answer to ending the over population of free roaming cats," she said. "It made complete sense, was cost effective and humane. So, I tried my hand with a small colony at a local car dealership and had the free roaming cats altered within a few months. The dealership helped us and even allowed us to build a small feeding station on the grounds."

Hensley also helped control a cat colony at a local grocery store that was eating out of its dumpsters.

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Available to residents

The TNR program is available to any Nacogdoches resident wishing to ensure that feral cats near their home or business have been spayed or neutered.

"It takes a village to work together to humanely reduce the animal population," Hensley said. "A few volunteers (most of whom work full-time) cannot possibly handle the community's free roaming cat population without help from the community."

"While many people say the community is the problem, one can also say that the community is the solution. I firmly believe that our community wants to do the right thing."

Residents interested in trap/neuter/return can borrow traps from O'Malley.

"We will provide instructions from trapping all the way to recovery after their spay/neuter procedure," said Hensley. "O'Malley Alley Cat Organization can also help with cost of vetting. For those people who are disabled or unable to set a trap or transport, we offer assistance for that as well."

Some residents opt to call animal control instead of going through the rigmarole of trapping — something Hensley

discourages.

Instead of animal shelter

"People should always choose trap/neuter/return over animal shelters," she said. "Feral or frightened cats do not do well in shelters and are most often killed because they are deemed un-adoptable. In fact, a number of shelters in East Texas kill wild cats upon intake as they do not have cage space for these types of animals."

"Austin and San Antonio are excellent examples of cities that have proven records that TNR works. Their intake and euthanasia rates have dropped significantly since implementing TNR and high volume spay/neuter."

TOMACO also received a grant from PetSmart Charities to spay/neuter and vaccinate with rabies free-roaming cats in the area surrounding SFA. That area stretches from Lanana to Banita creeks, and from Austin Street to King/Houston Street.

For those interested in TNR, email feralaristocat@yahoo.com or call 936-556-2754 and leave a message. For more information, visit www.omalley-alleycat.com or www.alleycat.org.

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