

Posted on Wed, May. 31, 2006

## Film stars homeless cats



Humane Society Silicon Valley / Special to the Mercury News

Mike Foltz of the Humane Society Silicon Valley checks out a kitten and talks about its adoptability in "Cats Without a Home," a documentary about homeless cats in Santa Clara County.

By Linda Goldston

### Mercury News

At the Friends Colony in San Jose, Cathy Grovenburg looks for Monica, Joey, Rachel, Phoebe, Chandler and Ross every evening.

Just across the freeway, at the Sicle Colony, she checks on Fudgesicle, Popsicle, Icesicle and Dreamsicle -- and a bunch of other ``Sicles" with long tails and pointy ears. Not your usual housing developments.

They are where Grovenburg feeds the cats, part of the estimated 125,000 homeless cats in Santa Clara County. But she also traps them so they can be spayed or neutered -- the best solution for the homeless cat

problem, say experts.



Humane Society Silicon Valley / Special to the Mercury News

James Reinhardt of Santa Clara County Animal Control checks on feral and stray cats caught in traps in "Cats Without a Home," a documentary about homeless cats in Santa Clara County.

Every year, about 14,000 cats have to be euthanized at county shelters because they are too young, too sick or too wild to be adopted.

After seeing some stray cats near her office, ``I just needed to help a couple of cats and then you realize how widespread the problem is," said Grovenburg, a volunteer for both the Humane Society Silicon Valley and Silicon Valley Friends of Ferals.

Grovenburg is also featured in a new film about the plight of homeless cats in the county -- the success stories, of healthy maintained cat colonies, and the

tragedies of homeless cats hit by cars, attacked by dogs or killed by disease and never spayed or neutered.

Called "Cats Without a Home," the 30-minute documentary was produced by Humane Society Silicon Valley in collaboration with Todd Lehr of Jump Cutters Video in San Jose.

"We have got to really address this issue," said Christine Benninger, president of Humane Society Silicon Valley. "It's really an astounding problem -- 125,000 homeless cats in the county. If we had 125,000 homeless dogs, people would be up in arms."

At the core of the film is the message that it doesn't need to be this way, that the homeless animal population could be reduced so easily through a program called TNR -- Trap, Neuter and Return.

It involves volunteers such as Grovenburg using humane traps to catch the homeless cats, then taking them to veterinarians to be vaccinated, spayed or neutered and then releasing them back to the area where they are fed.

The film follows several people as they make their rounds putting out food at various cat colonies in the county. But it also features interviews with the people who have to deal with the saddest part of the problem: euthanizing the cats that have no chance of being adopted or cared for.

"The cats aren't the problem, people are," said Carole Miller, co-founder and president of the Stanford Cat Network, which has been caring for homeless cats on the Stanford University campus since 1989.

When volunteers with the network started, there were an estimated 500 homeless on the Stanford campus. Today, after years of trapping and spay/neutering, there are about 50.

Benninger and others said the problem often is caused by the backyard feeder who is trying to help two or three stray cats, but who never takes the time to trap them and have them spayed or neutered. So the cats multiply -- rapidly.

"They're probably 75 percent of the problem," Benninger said. "So many people are feeding one or two cats and then it just grows and grows. These are the people we're really trying to reach out to."

The film, which will be shown at various sites throughout the summer, will be used to help raise money for spay-neuter clinics and help pay medical costs. Eliminating the problem would save county residents \$2.4 million each year, Benninger said. That's the amount the county and various humane societies pay each year to deal with homeless and feral cats -- from having litters of 3-week-old kittens dropped off at shelters to euthanizing 14,000 cats.

"There simply aren't enough homes for these cats to go to because we humans allowed these cats to breed indiscriminately," Grovenburg said.

---

Contact Linda Goldston at [lgoldston@mercurynews.com](mailto:lgoldston@mercurynews.com) or (408) 920-5862.