

Celebrate Spay and Neuter Awareness Month: support Garfield's Rescue Inc.

Teddy and his sister Tina were recently surrendered to Garfield's Rescue Inc. (GRI) by a gentleman whose pet cat, originally a stray and unsterilized, had kittens back in August.

He couldn't find anyone to "give" the kittens to and he could not afford to spay/neuter the mother leaving her fertile to reproduce more kittens, reported GRI vice president Ann Bedford.

Congratulations to Teddy on being the 2000th rescue foster with GRI, she said. Teddy is now a celebrity and is ready for adoption along with many other homeless rescued cats and kittens.

Awareness month

February is Spay and Neuter Awareness Month, a global reminder of the profound benefits of spay/neuter (sterilization) for cats. This medical procedure prevents unwanted litters and is the only permanent, 100% effective method of birth control for cats and dogs. Homeless cats and kittens are increasingly impacting shelter/rescue populations, and as cute as they are, pet adoptions aren't keeping pace with intake making it more crucial than ever to seek out spay/neuter resources for pets and homeless rescues.

Lifesaving spay/neuter is a simple step to reverse the exhausting, endless cycle of reproduction in cats and dogs and curb the cycle of overpopulation. A fertile female cat produces an average of three



Teddy is Garfield's Rescue Inc.'s 2000th rescue foster.

litters in a year, with the average number of kittens in a feline litter being four to six.

The American Veterinary Medical Association reports that up to 4,948 kittens can be born from one unsplayed cat and her offspring in seven years. Using that analogy, GRI, since their inception, may have prevented the unwanted births of a staggering 9, 896, 000 felines in the Northern Neck making it a safer, healthier place to live, work and raise a family, said Bedford.

It gives a negative perception of a community when homeless cats are left to take care of themselves. The community then deals with unchecked births and the sight of starving and sick animals, like Doogie and Dooley, seven-week-old siblings, starving and crying, tied up in a bag and thrown away in a dumpster

then rescued by a GRI volunteer or Yvonne, a starving, emaciated nursing momma of four rescued by a GRI volunteer. These unsterilized, unvaccinated felines and hundreds like them have been rescued and given lifesaving spay/neuter surgeries and vaccinated against life threatening disease, in service to local communities, said Bedford.

February 25 was World Spay Day, dedicated to raising awareness of the benefits of spaying and neutering pets. Since the pandemic, there have been shifts in access, availability and cost of spay/neuter, leaving many pet owners unable to find or afford the surgery. This has resulted in an increasing birth rate, which continues to overwhelm shelters and rescues and is saturating communities.

Shelter Animal's Count's data from 2023 showed 57% of the 2.9 million felines entering shelters were kittens under five months, representing nearly 1.7 million kittens. This means slightly more than a quarter of the total animal intake in 2024 was kittens, so intake numbers could be vastly reduced through increased spay/neuter.

Local effort

In 2024 GRI rescued 272 kittens less than six months, often requiring more urgent care and longer stays in the GRI foster house until they are age/weight appropriate for lifesaving spay/neuter surgery and vaccinations to prevent, and protect against, life threatening disease, said Bedford.

Kittens as young as four months old can get pregnant and have litters of their own. Early lifesaving spay/neuter matters which is why GRI practices proactive pediatric spay/neuter to:

- Prevent unwanted litters—reducing the burden on already

overwhelmed shelters and rescues.

- Protect against cancer and illness—spaying a female cat before her first heat cycle reduces her risk of mammary cancer by 91%.

- Curb nuisance behaviors—preventing marking, yowling, and aggression that can lead to surrender and broken bonds between cats and their families.

Since GRI's inception in 2020, 1,172 cats/kittens have been spayed/neutered, she said. In 2024, 290 cats/kittens were spayed/neutered. GRI will not release any cat/kitten to an adopter unless it has been spayed/neutered assuring that any cat adopted from GRI cannot reproduce in the future.

Spay/neuter costs consume a very large portion of the GRI budget. The average cost of the spay/neuter surgery is \$118. In addition to the spay/neuter surgery there are necessary medical tasks and procedures to screen for disease and prevent illnesses. These range from rabies vaccinations to flea/tick treatments and the average cost is \$170. The total of the spay/neuter surgery and additional preventative medical items, the cost becomes \$288 per cat, said Bedford.

GRI's wonderful donors give in support of rescuing homeless cats and kittens for a second chance at life," she said. Their generosity and support save lives and together the community of support and GRI will continue to prevent suffering of homeless cats and kittens in the Northern Neck.

The community is urged to continue to support lifesaving spay/neuter services to prevent unwanted litters of kittens by donating to GRI, PO Box 257, Kilmarnock, VA 22482. Those who have questions, are urged to email garfieldsrescue@gmail.com

at Virginia State Parks

some parks have personal grill restrictions, so visitors should contact the park before making plans to bring one.

An exception to the law is campgrounds that have an on-duty camp host. In those situations, signage will indicate

cellations and severe weather procedures.

Reservations can be made at reservevaparks.com or 1-800-933-7275 and choosing option 5. Camping reservations can be made up to 2 p.m. on the day of arrival.