

A First For Maui Felines



Vet Tech Rebecca Harper volunteered at 9th Life Hawaii's three-day spay/neuter clinic.

As Phyllis Tavares, executive director of 9th Life Hawaii, has said many times, "On Maui, the cat overpopulation is clearly visible. The only humane solution to the problem is to spay and neuter as many cats as we possibly can, as often as we can."

Even with donations dwindling in today's economy, Phyllis remains true to her word. 9th Life continues to hold as many low or no cost spay/neuter clinics as possible.

Never giving up on the Maui community, Phyllis said, "It takes a community to solve a community problem."

Last month, residents responded like never before, making Maui's first marathon, three-day feline spay/neuter clinic a resounding success. Thanks to contacts supplied by a former Maui resident, Dr. Jeffery Young (Planned Pethood Plus-Colorado), Dr. Jeffery Fankhauser, also from Colorado, and Dr. Leeth Harper from Arkansas donated their veterinary services. Dr. Young, who assembled the team, has long been involved in low-cost spay/neuter clinics both in the United States and abroad, performing over 165,000 spay/neuter procedures.

Together, the vets and their staff neutered over 459 cats here on Maui.

As one might imagine, holding a clinic of this magnitude is no easy task. A core of dedicated 9th Life volunteers worked tirelessly making phone calls, visiting businesses, handing out flyers and sending press releases to the media weeks before to spread the word about the upcoming clinic.

Maui resident Jeff Varel donated a week of local advertising and lent brand new traps for the feral cats.

As always, while donations were welcomed, the clinic was free to hardship cases. Maui residents were taking responsibility for both pet and feral cats in increasing numbers as word spread and the momentum grew. 9th Life received many calls requesting information, appointments and surgical consent forms.

Being familiar with 9th Life Hawai‘i, and having been chosen by a very special kitten from the sanctuary myself, I agreed to help in any way I could for two of the three clinic days. The huge response and kuleana of the Maui community was almost overwhelming.

Assisting with check-in, I was impressed by a resident who brought in 20 cats. Because there were not enough carriers, the cats were brought in several at a time. Not only did this Upcountry resident make a donation, she and her daughters also helped in the recovery area.

And who could forget the volunteers who picked up and delivered cats from Kihei, Makawao, Kahului and even Lahaina all three days? Some volunteers even rented large vans to ensure cats could be safely transported to and from the clinic.

People arrived throughout the day; some with cats and others just to help. There were too many to name or properly thank. Several men help-ed with check-in, lugging heavy carriers two and from the vans. Teens and keiki—some as young as seven—worked in the recovery room to monitor and awaken cats after surgery. The list goes on.

The vets worked throughout the three days completely in sync—methodically, safely and efficiently neutering more than 150 cats a day.

When lunchtime arrived, I was introduced to Deb and Trip Lynch, who provided food for over 35 volunteers on each day of the clinic. They cooked and prepared a sumptuous lunch buffet complete with luscious desserts.

The Grand Wailea graciously provided two days of free accommodations to the vets and their staff after the clinic was over.

Yes, Maui’s response was astonishing. Maybe that’s the “Maui Magic” Phyllis always talks about. Even more rewarding for 9th Life Hawai‘i and its volunteers are the letters and emails of gratitude from residents who mentioned they simply could not have afforded to sterilize their cats if 9th Life had not offered them the free or low-cost option.

The Maui community should be proud of their efforts, and the fact that there are 459 cats who won’t be adding more kittens to the overpopulation that plagues our island.

The three vets and the staff were pleased, too. Dr. Young has agreed to return for another clinic in September.

For information on how you can help 9th Life Hawaii continue these clinics, call 572-3499 or visit the 9th Life Hawaii Website at www.9thlifehawaii.org.

Volunteer fundraisers, foster parents, tile installers, carpenters and painters are also needed.

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