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St. George, Best Friends working together to save lives of community cats

St. GEORGE, Utah — The City of St. George and Utah-based national animal welfare organization Best Friends Animal Society made great strides in 2013 in saving the lives of free-roaming cats.

The City Council voted unanimously in January 2013 to support a public-private partnership with Best Friends Animal Society to stop the breeding of community (aka feral) cats. The city has fully embraced Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), the proven, effective way to humanely stop the breeding of community (aka feral) cats.

Through the partnership, Kanab-based Best Friends runs a program where free-roaming, un-owned cats are live-trapped, spayed or neutered, vaccinated and released back in their location where they can live out their lives.

“The St. George community has embraced TNR for some time now and thanks to individuals like Kris Neal with One More Chance (C.A.T.S), huge strides have already been made in reducing community cat populations. This new partnership simply provided the final piece of the puzzle.

“Through St. George’s Community Cat Program these kitties have the opportunity to live without breeding. In the past these cats had very poor chance of survival; but now, by not having them enter the shelter in the first place, it gives another group of needy felines—relinquished housecats—more time to be adopted and we’ve seen a significant increase in their save rates,” Dankert said.

Since the program began, there has been a dramatic improvement in the save rate for cats. Data provided by the St. George Animal Shelter show that in 2012 the cat save rate was about 44 percent and this year, with the program fully in place, the save-rate has risen dramatically to 98 percent.

“TNR does reduce cat populations, but it doesn’t happen overnight. We are already seeing a reduction in cat intake” Dankert said. “In 2013 cat intake into the St. George shelter decreased by 22 percent from the same period last year.

“First we determine where the cats are coming from, then we focus on those intake areas and offer TNR services as well as spay/neuter services for pet cats,” said Janice Dankert of Best Friends’ Four Directions Community Cat Program. “We find this method works great to help both the cats and the community.

“One of the main benefits of TNR is it dramatically lowers the nuisance complaints because the behaviors such as yowling and spraying drop significantly in sterilized cats.

“But Best Friends absolutely understands that some people may not want cats in their yards,” Dankert said. “We are happy to share with them information on products, and methods, that will keep cats out of their gardens but not harm the cats. We have resources on the Best Friends Animal Society website <http://bestfriends.org/What-We-Do/Our-Work/Initiatives/Cat-Initiatives/>.

Best Friends runs similar programs throughout the country with great results, Dankert added.

“However, there is still a huge need for help with adoptable cats. Another great local group, Providing Animals With Support (PAWS), does a tremendous job helping the shelter adopt out more cats by transferring shelter cats to their adoption center. Right now, their center is full and they are in great need of temporary foster homes.”

Persons interested in helping PAWS by fostering cats should contact 435-688-9748.

“If you are seeing free-roaming unowned cats in your neighborhood, we can help. Please call [435-773-8533](tel:435-773-8533) or email sutahccp@bestfriends.org” Dankert said. “And if you are looking to add a loving new furry member to your family, please remember to adopt from a shelter or rescue group. To find rescue animals in your area go to www.petfinder.org.”

About Best Friends Animal Society®

[Best Friends Animal Society](http://bestfriends.org) is the only national animal welfare organization focused exclusively on ending the killing of dogs and cats in America's shelters. An authority and leader in the no-kill movement since its founding in 1984, Best Friends runs the nation's largest no-kill sanctuary for companion animals, as well as life-saving programs in partnership with rescue groups and shelters across the country. Since its founding, Best Friends has helped reduce the number of animals killed in shelters from 17 million per year to around 4 million. Best Friends has the knowledge, technical expertise and on-the-ground network to end the killing and Save Them All™.

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