

# faithful friends

*Improving the lives of pets and people*



## **Keep the cats inside, advocates say**

*SPCA, Faithful Friends helping Edgemoor Gardens stave off more animal cruelties*

By ROBIN BROWN • The News Journal • July 21, 2008

Animal advocates are urging Edgemoor Gardens residents to keep pets indoors until authorities catch those who burned a kitten to death. The warning was spread Sunday by advocates in door-to-door outreach, which also alerted residents that trapping will start tonight to protect the lives of other unclaimed cats in the wake of the July 10 cat killing.



"There are many, many homeless cats here," advocate Jane Pierantozzi of Faithful Friends said Sunday night after she and others from the nonprofit animal welfare agency walked the neighborhood spreading word of a reward and tip line in the kitten cruelty case, which is still under investigation.

Working with the Delaware SPCA, Faithful Friends plans to remove kittens and cats that have no owners, give them veterinary care, sterilize and inoculate them, then find them rural homes. "We need some farm owners with big hearts willing to give them homes," Pierantozzi said.

Edgemoor Gardens residents fear more animals, and people, will be hurt because "there's nothing for kids to do here, no community center, nothing," she said. "Some said they are going to move because of the kitten-burning."

The amount of the reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible will depend on donations, but the Delaware SPCA started the fund with \$500, Executive Director Anne F. Cavanaugh said.

The neighborhood was canvassed after the crime by New Castle County police, investigators from the Office of the State Fire Marshal and officers from the Delaware SPCA and Kent County SPCA -- but authorities will not say what, if anything, they learned. Resident Lisa Mills has said she saw three boys, apparently younger teens, pour lighter fluid on the kitten and set it on fire. She said the kitten died under a tree about 10 yards from her home -- with flames reaching utility wires that started sparking -- as some neighbors watched and laughed.

"This is a felony offense," Cavanaugh said, citing the exact part of Delaware Code (Title 11, Chapter 5, Subchapter 7, Subsection 1325) on cruelty to animals. The law says conviction is punishable by a \$5,000 fine and 15-year ban on owning animals. Neglect is the most common kind of cruelty, she said,

but burnings are relatively rare. A necropsy was done on the remains of the adolescent cat, Cavanaugh said, but findings will not be released while the investigation continues.

Animal lover Sandie Carroll of the Milltown area said she couldn't wait to give to a reward fund. As soon as she learned of the cat killing, she e-mailed rescue groups to urge them to collect contributions, even before the reward fund was set up. Her message to the kids who saw the killing and know who did it is simple. "Next time, it could be your pet," she said. "Do the right thing."

If that type of appeal doesn't help investigators uncover the kitten-killers' identities, Carroll and others say, the reward should. "I really do believe the money is what's going to get these kids arrested and convicted, I really do," said Carroll, who trains dogs and works for Holman Moving Systems near New Castle. "If nothing else works, money does."

The fund and anonymous tip line were set up by the Delaware SPCA, which, at its own cost, investigates cruelty cases in New Castle and Sussex counties, where it has shelters. "That's part of our mission, cruelty prevention and cruelty investigation," Cavanaugh said.

Reward donations also are being collected by Faithful Friends, which planned its outreach after the kitten's death, partly to offer its free and low-cost pet services to residents. Pierantozzi said it is important to urge Edgemoor Gardens residents to keep pets indoors until the cat-killers are caught because such crimes nearly always are repeat offenses. And experts say such cruelty escalates, with tragic results.

"Nationally, research shows that often serial killers started out by harming animals," she said. "Those working in the public safety and animal welfare fields know this." Pierantozzi said she knows people who saw what happened may fear retaliation if they identify those involved. "I think most people realize that someone who would do something like that, such cruelty to an animal, are capable of doing harm to people," she said.

"This person who did this is an individual who needs to get help and will harm other animals, if not people, if they haven't already," she added. Keeping pets indoors also will make it easier for advocates to identify homeless cats in the neighborhood, Pierantozzi said.

Cats with collars will not be picked up, but all cats outdoors will be checked for microchip identification. Any with owners will be returned, she said.

Sunday's outreach also told residents of Faithful Friends' free services for pit bulls and mixes, such as sterilization, dog training and a free pet food bank.

In a second phase, Faithful Friends plans to trap feral or unsocialized cats, sterilize and inoculate them, then free them where they were found. "We will be seeking people in the community who are already feeding or would be willing to feed the ferals that are released," Pierantozzi said.

Carroll, not a rescue group member, said she hopes the outreach and efforts to protect other cats will help encourage residents who saw the kitten's killing to break their silence. As tragic as the kitten's fate was, she said, "it's even sadder that the people up there are protecting these kids who did this."

**Contact robin brown at 324-2856 or [rbrown@delawareonline.com](mailto:rbrown@delawareonline.com).**

12A Germay Drive • Germay Industrial Park • Wilmington, Delaware 19804

[www.faithfulfriends.us](http://www.faithfulfriends.us) • [Info@faithfulfriends.us](mailto:Info@faithfulfriends.us)

302-427-8514 Administration • 302-427-8008 Pet 'life' Line • 302-427-2855 Fax Line