

precious pets

By Junior Writer, **Halle Faulk**



EAGLE COMMUNITY CATS



Julie's son helping to take care of the kittens.

No one wants to see an animal suffer, especially in their own community. Fortunately for us here in Eagle, there are plenty of incredible and dedicated people who are willing to volunteer their time to stop, prevent, and reduce such suffering from happening. This list includes the wonderful work done by Julie Palo George and a team of volunteers, called Eagle Community Cats.

With the continued development of our community comes the responsibility to care for the hundreds of neglected and displaced cats who have been impacted by the ongoing construction and environmental change that comes with our continually expanding neighborhoods. Community cats, also called feral cats or barn cats, are losing their sheltered spaces of barns, outbuildings, and grasslands. Where they formally survived by hunting field mice and watered themselves by our rivers and canals, they are now being forced out into the open, public places near trash cans and dumpsters. Community cats live outdoors and generally are not socialized to people, and therefore are un-adoptable. They live full, healthy lives with their feline families, called colonies, in their outdoor home.

Julie is part of a very special movement that benefits the local cat population. The Eagle Community Cat team not only helps Eagle neighbors find their lost cats, they lay the groundwork for trapping, spay/neutering, and returning (aka TNR) community cats. She and a team of volunteers are working hard to help cats either get back to their owners, get them spayed/neutered, then returned back to their original location once healthy. Or, tamed and adopted through partnerships with shelters such as Simply Cats Adoption Center. (Simply Cats). When performing this work, she tries to accomplish

three things: educate the public about community cats and efforts being made, collaborate with others, and utilize all resources available in order to make sure that the cats are well cared for.

Eagle Community Cat volunteers work with local business and personal property owners in Eagle to provide food, water and even shelters for the community cats, as well as perform TNR. This provides the community with a viable and humane solution to the growing population of feral and abandoned cats and kittens. Many people look for a quick fix and would like someone to come remove or relocate cats from their territory. However, removing cats is a flawed approach as a long-term strategy as it has been proven to be not only ineffective due to the "Vacuum Effect," but also inhumane, and does not prevent population growth.

Now to the specifics of Trap, Neuter, Return (TNR). TNR is a term that originated in the 1950s but wasn't truly implemented until the 1990s. Since then, it is becoming the standard procedure for dealing with community cats in most cities. According to Alley Cat Allies, "The Vacuum Effect has been documented worldwide in many species. Animal control's traditional approach has been to catch and kill community cats. While this may temporarily reduce the number of community cats in a given area, it is ultimately counterproductive, as the population of cats rebounds. Due to the Vacuum Effect, unaltered cats continue to breed, and other cats move into the newly available territory."

To summarize: when no cats are in an area, it allows others to move in and continue to grow the population there, but when



TNR is applied effectively, the territory is claimed and stops the stress associated with pregnancy and mating behaviors, such as yowling or fighting. Not only is TNR the effective, humane approach for outdoor cats, but it improves their lives. Because of this, the population of feral cats will decrease in a natural way without the threat of more coming in, because that space is still being claimed by cats with no threat of reproducing.

When implementing TNR, Julie revealed, the key is to assess every situation with a fresh mind. She needs to know which cats are spayed and neutered (this is revealed by if the cat is ear-tipped or not, which is a universal sign that a cat is fixed and saves females from unnecessary surgery) and which cats are feral, in which case she proceeds to safely trap them, vaccinate them, fix any medical problems, and then return them back to the specific area they were found. It is also important to determine if they are micro-chipped, so she scans them with a microchip scanner. If microchipped, the cat will be returned to its owner. If not and no owner is located, Simply Cats will usually take them and put them up for adoption to find a new home. Every feral cat is assessed to see if it can be tamed, and in those cases, she and the team tame them and take them to Simply Cats for adoption. Taming a viable kitten or cat can take a few days up to several weeks or months. The Eagle Community Cat team then takes on the long-term care of the colony, and the cats become accustomed to a caretaker. This helps them identify which cats still need help.

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When handling the cats, the most vital thing to remember is that each individual cat is different and should be taken care of as such. For these reasons, Julie is furthering the tangible impact she is making by setting up Eagle Community Cats, which is a network of individuals and resources in our area who are devoted to these cats. This process largely involves her connecting the pieces of pre-existing movements whose missions are aligned with her own. Through her efforts, she has met other like-minded people in our community who have already been doing this quietly and tirelessly for many years. This coordinated effort creates a team that is unified for the public to go to for help in any situation of this nature.

You can help reduce this problem of overpopulation by starting with your own cat. Getting your cat spayed or neutered will not only stop the breeding cycle, but it will also minimize roaming habits and keep your cat closer to home. There are several low-cost programs for spay/neuter, and it really does make a difference. Also, microchipping your cat and making sure the contact information for the microchip is always kept current (there are free websites that do this) helps Julie and any rescue volunteer or shelter quickly identify where to return a lost cat. There are local low-cost microchip clinics available on a regular basis.

If you want to assist further, you can donate in multiple ways to help Eagle Community Cats and Simply Cats. These donations can include food, litter, new or used cat supplies, blankets and towels, or monetary donations. There are also many ways to participate such as fostering, transporting, or colony care. Monetary donations are always helpful for medical care, supplies or intake fees, which can be made directly to Simply Cats, a 501(c)3 organization, and it will be earmarked for Eagle Community Cats. It is also helpful to spread awareness and help the cats you see in your neighborhood by making sure they have good homes or a caretaker. Backing and supporting groups like Julie's in your community also has a profound impact. Let them know they have support by inquiring how you can lend a hand. It only takes a little work by each of us to make a lot of progress.

Ultimately, Julie loves what she does, because she knows she is making a difference in her community and for the animals who truly need her help.



If you want to learn more about community cats, you can check out these websites, or contact Julie directly at (208) 412-7093.

www.eaglecommunitycats.org
www.simplycats.org



Do you have a precious pet story?
 Did your pet rescue YOU? Email brandi.wolf@n2pub.com.

