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Scratching away at feral cat problem

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BY [STEVE METSCH](#), Staff Writer

Bob O'Neill has a problem with all the wild cats running around his neighborhood.

Not that he wants to do away with them or anything. In fact, his house is nearly overrun with them.

He just wants a better effort made to neuter and spay feral cats to cut back on the number of unwanted kittens that just end up in a shelter and, more than likely, euthanized.

O'Neill lives in the 9800 block of South Oakley Avenue in Chicago's Beverly community. His overgrown back yard is home to about 10 - the number varies - feral cats. A couple of cats live indoors with him, including Alley, a white cat named for, well, where she was found.

For several years, a woman who cared for his mother while she shared the home with O'Neill would put food out for the neighborhood cats.

Her efforts were so popular with the neighborhood cats that O'Neill at one point considered getting his mom another caretaker. But the cats had become dependent on the free food, and he didn't want to starve them by not leaving food out for them.

"I was looking for something to do with them, but the only logical thing was to trap them and bring them to shelters. Unfortunately, the shelters are over-packed and, more likely than not, had the cats destroyed.

"Why send them to their death just for being born? I was frustrated. I didn't want to send them off to be killed," he said.

He contacted Matt Walsh, executive director of the Beverly Area Planning Association, who put together a neighborhood forum that was attended by Collette Walker, of Western Springs-based Triple R Pets.

Triple R Pets captures cats in traps, takes them to a vet to be spayed or neutered. While there, the cats get their shots and are checked for health issues.

Volunteers for the not-for-profit organization then return the cats to where they were captured in order to prevent other feral cats from establishing colonies in those areas, said Walker, who coordinates the spay-and-neuter program for the group. She called it their TNR, or "Trap, Neuter and Return" policy.

"I don't know if it's a bad problem with cats in Beverly, but until now it's been underrecognized," Walker said.

Walker credited O'Neill and The Village, the monthly publication of the planning association, with bringing attention to the problem.

The groups planned to trap another colony of wild cats in Midlothian this week and will tackle "two very large colonies of 15 to 25 cats each" next week in Beverly, Walker said. Those homeowners, unlike O'Neill, requested anonymity, she said.

Feral cats, Walker said, don't pose dangers to people.

"Usually, if you see them, they'll run away. They will not attack. When you do find damage, it's usually been done by a raccoon or possum," Walker said.

Feral cats do mark their territory with urine but won't do that after they've been neutered, she said. Nor will they yowl at night when breeding, "because once they're spayed or neutered, they don't have a need to reproduce anymore," Walker said.

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