



Newsletter

Montgomery County's Newest Animal Welfare Group

Volume 1, Issue 6

August 2006

**Animal Welfare League of
Montgomery County**
P.O. Box 7041
Gaithersburg, MD 20898
Telephone: (301) 740-2511
website: www.awlmc.org

Calendar of Events

Upcoming Adoption Events

Kentlands Petsmart Saturday Adoption Events

- Sep 2
- Sep 9
- Sep 16
- Sep 23
- Sep 30

White Flint Petsmart Sunday Adoption Event

- Sep 17

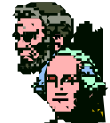
Upcoming Labor Day Event in Kensington

- Sep 4

ANY ARTICLE IDEAS? PLEASE E-MAIL ROGER
OR JONATHAN WITH THEM. GUEST WRITERS
ARE MOST WELCOME! THANK YOU LAURIE,
PAT (AKA DANI), KACEY, BARB G., AND
LINDA WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THIS MONTHS
NEWSLETTER.

Message from the President

Laurie Graham



Hi fellow volunteers, I hope that everyone had a good summer. It went by way too quickly. It has been a busy time for the AWLMC. We are currently in the middle of kitten season and the County is, once again, overwhelmed with homeless kittens. Our intake, foster, and adoption teams have been working tirelessly to get as many animals saved as possible. A special thank you to Debby Shore and Kacey Nolle for handling intakes in the last few months. Until we get a shelter, we are dependent upon foster homes, so please spread the word that we need foster homes. Our foster program, led by Deb Kirby and Francine Pivinski, can be contacted at foster@awlmc.org.

Because we don't want our kittens to ever contribute to pet over-population, we are in the process of ensuring that all of our animals are spayed or neutered prior to adoption. Any animal, 6 months or older, has always been spayed or neutered prior to adoption by the AWLMC. Soon, thanks to Janet Culp, we will have a low age spay/neuter program. This will mean that we can have kittens as young as 10 weeks surgically altered. Janet has already contacted our veterinarians and is in the process of getting low age agreements in place.

On the shelter front, we are still following a promising lead to rent the space that is currently being used by Gaithersburg Square Veterinary Center. The management company is considering our proposal. Our biggest problem in renting a shelter facility is, of course, funding. The fundraising committee, led by Nona Silver, has a number of events planned in the

Continued on page 2

next couple of months and we would love it if you could come out and participate. We will be at the Kensington Labor Day Parade on September 4th and the Oktoberfest celebrations in Germantown and Gaithersburg on September 7th and 8th, respectively. These are great opportunities to get to know your fellow volunteers, have some fun, and raise money for the shelter. If you can help out, please contact us at volunteer@awlmc.org.

Our adoption team continues to have adoption events every weekend. We even managed to have 2 events on the same day! The last couple of adoption events that we have had at the Petsmart near the White Flint Mall have been very successful. These events were set-up by Heidi Weber and Karen Diegmüller. At the August 19th event, we had 3 adults adopted from the White Flint Petsmart. The new adoption coordinators, Karen Diegmüller, Dee Martynuska, and Francine Pivinski, have been doing a great job with the adoption program.

If you haven't had a chance yet, please go check out our new web site, www.awlmc.org. It is really a great site. We owe a big thank you to Yale Tankus for getting this set up. ∞∞∞∞

The Tale of a Minor Scratch

Dani Sinclair

I write fiction for a living folks, but this is a true story. My son's girlfriend adopted a feisty orange kitten we rescued when it was about eight weeks old. Clyde is almost one year old now and he still tends to play rough, so when Dan noticed a really tiny scratch on his hand he thought nothing of it. When it became a little red and puffy and sore he became mildly concerned.

Being a mother I insisted he call the doctor and tell them he had a possible infection from an animal wound. Of course, by now it's three o'clock on a Friday afternoon and the doctor isn't available until Monday. However, there's an emergency number he can call

first thing Saturday morning and they'll try to work him in to see another doctor.



Except, of course, that Dan and Michelle have to be in Annapolis Saturday morning to attend a party her employer is hosting on his yacht. Dan's hand is only a little red and tender and who among us is going to turn down an opportunity to go sailing on the bay in a full sized yacht?

Sun, fresh air, more sun and a good time is had by all. Until eight o'clock Sunday morning when intense pain wakes him and Dan discovers he is unable to move any of his fingers on that hand. The area still looks only mildly red and swollen but the pain is all out of proportion to appearances. A telephone call to the doctor's emergency line gets him immediately connected to the doctor, no waiting required. Dan has just bought himself a long, painful Sunday morning at the nearest hospital emergency room.

He's lucky, he's told by a doctor who dares the hospital sees cases like this all the time. He doesn't have Cat Scratch Fever, which can take years to heal. However, this incredibly miniscule scratch has

now caused an extremely painful condition known as Cellulites. It's very possible Dan has suffered permanent tendon damage. He may never regain the full use of his hand. He may suffer from a permanent weakness in the muscles of his arm. But he'll need to see a plastic surgeon first thing Monday to be sure. In the meantime, the arm requires a sling and elevation and he'll need to stay out of the sun. Otherwise, the skin discoloration on his hand could become permanent. Antibiotics and pain pills are prescribed.

Dan **was** lucky. Two weeks later he was assured that his skin's peeling was a normal reaction. The infection killed off the outer layer of skin on his hand, but he had sustained no lasting damage to nerves, tendons or muscles.

According to what he was told, not only do hospitals see cases like his all the time, it's frequently a problem when the scratch comes from a cat under one year old. Their claws don't tend to be as clean after using the litter box.

Like most of you reading this, I've handled any number of cats and kittens. I can't count the number of times I've been scratched. However, also like most of you, I know that animal bites and scratches can be dirty and infection can set up shop with little warning. Any animal scratch or bite should be cleaned thoroughly. (We can all say yes, mama, here.) But the moral of this story is important.

At the first sign of redness or swelling around a scratch or bite seek medical help. You really can't believe how minor this appeared to be nor how quickly it became a serious issue. ∞∞∞

Animal Legislative Update

Roger Gagne

Linda Buel suggested an article on animal right legislative initiatives and provided data from the American Humane Association concerning current on-going federal and local legislative efforts which

are summarized as follows:

Federal Legislation

American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act

This bill would permanently outlaw the slaughter of horses in America for human consumption. Last year, a one-year ban on the practice was achieved; however, the U.S. Department of Agriculture bowed to pressure from the foreign-owned companies that operate the slaughterhouses and refused to implement it.

Pet Animal Welfare Statute (PAWS) Act

This bill is targeted toward the reform of the inhumane "puppy mill" industry where dogs and cats are bred continuously under sub-standard conditions. PAWS legislation has been introduced in both houses of Congress in an attempt to make sure large-scale pet breeders provide their animals with basic requirements of food, water, rest and space.

Antifreeze Bittering Agent Act

Every year, thousands of children and pets are poisoned by ingesting antifreeze, drawn by its sweet taste. Even a small amount can cause serious illness or death. Congress is considering bills that would require antifreeze manufacturers to add a "bittering" agent to eliminate the product's sweet taste and thereby reduce accidental poisonings.

Local Legislation

Virginia – Humane Education: This bill would enable Virginia's schools to conduct instruction on the humane treatment of animals and the importance of preventing cruelty.

Reference: The Humane Review – A newsletter for Friends of the American Humane Association – Volume 5, Number 2. ∞∞∞

Fund Raiser

39th Annual Kensington Labor Day Parade

Monday September 4th 10 AM to 2 PM

A fundraising event for our no kill shelter
AWL Booth - games, cat hats, food & more!

Volunteers still needed

Adoption News

Roger Gagne

August was a good month for cat adoptions even though it's that time of year when people are thinking about vacations and going back to school and adoptions are usually notoriously slow. Through August 26, a net of 151 cats have been adopted from the AWLMC. August adoptions were:

August 5: Waldo, Sweetie Pie*, Patches, and Princess

August 12: Fluffy and Big Boy

August 19: Snow White, Princess #2, Henrietta, and Mittens

August 24: Teddy

August 26: Minnie, Louise, and Harvest

*subsequently returned

Busy Day at Kentlands – August 26, 2006



Barb G...received an e-mail from the adopters from Boyds of Big Boy and Fluffy, who were adopted on August 12th. These are the two kittens that she (Barb G...) had bottle fed since they were five days old. They now have new names both derived from Nordic Gods. Big Boy is now Loki, the Nordic God of Mischief; and, Fluffy is now Freya, the Nordic Goddess of Love. Good job Barb!

I appreciate receiving from the Fosters feedback provided by adopters concerning their new family members.

The roving AWLMC Photographer was present at the Kentlands adoption event on August 26. It was very busy

and there was a lot of interest as indicated the preceding picture.

Louise (adopted August 26) and her adopters are shown below.



Another Successful Adoption!!!∞∞∞∞

Volunteer Profile: "Sher" Polvinale

Jonathan Allen

Born in Washington, DC, Sherry "Sher" Polvinale grew up in the Camp Springs, MD area, just outside Andrews Air Force Base. She has worked for Glen Construction Co., Inc. in Gaithersburg for almost eight years, starting out as a part-time Administrative Assistant and working her way up to a full-time position as a Public Relations Assistant, ultimately becoming the PR/Human Resources Administrator. To pay her vet bills, Sher works every other weekend as an Activities Specialist in the Dementia Ward of an area nursing home.

Sher has a large, happy home, full of animals. Her pride and joy is her Quarter Horse, Kash, whom she rescued when he was only 3 years old and has raised to a ripe age of 23. She also has one cat of

Continued on page 5

her own, a tuxedo named Gilligan, who started out as a foster with the previous group and was brought in as a permanent family member. Gilligan shares the house with Buffy and Miss Kitty, two rescued seniors, and Giorgio and Gianni – a Balinese and Himalayan who were given up by their owners. Sher also has a parakeet named Happy, who, lost, flew into her house to find a permanent home, and a cockatiel named Precious, who was a gift from friends. In addition to all of these loving animals, she also has two dogs, Buddy, a rescued Pug mix who is almost 11 years old, and Spirit, an 11-week old Standard Poodle pup.

Sher loves to read, but hasn't had much time lately to do so, as she is starting up the House with a Heart (HWAH) Senior Pet Sanctuary, a non-profit organization dedicated to giving "comfort, love, and care to very senior cats and dogs."

The organization's first senior dog was BJ, a 10 pound, 11-year-old Chihuahua with almost no teeth, congestive heart failure, and a collapsing trachea. BJ had been left at the Humane Society by owners who could no longer care for him, and would have faced a painful, frightening end if it hadn't been for HWAH, who took him home and got him comfortable within three days. He lived with the group for a total of 15 days, all but the last 2 of which were very comfortable and happy.

Because of her experiences with HWAH, Sher is currently interested in learning about animal communication in hopes of being able to better understand what older animals need and how to give them more assurance and better care.

Sher hopes to find ways to partner HWAH and AWLMC, as many AWL members have expressed an interest in doing something special for senior cats at the end of their lives and, perhaps, finding adoptive homes for those who still have many years left. She also hopes that the group will soon only adopt out spayed and neutered cats and do home visits, as she sees them as essential to good adoptions. ∞∞∞

Handling Public Intake

Kacey Nolle

One of the most common questions the AWLMC receives about its policy and operations is, "Where do you get the cats?" The short answer is that most come from the Montgomery County Humane Society, thanks to the efforts of Debby Shore. But a large portion of our cats also come from individuals in the community; these are what we refer to as "public" intake.

Public intake includes cats from owners, cats who were found as strays, and kittens born to feral mothers. These intakes generally come from people calling the AWLMC's public intake line or emailing the group when they have a cat to place, and we receive several such requests during a given week.

Unfortunately, since we do not yet have a shelter, we are greatly limited in how many cats we can take into our system. This leads to a problem common to growing rescue organizations: since we must limit the number of cats we accept, how do we choose which ones to take? The philosophy behind AWLMC's intake policy is that we want to help as many cats as possible; achieving this goal is trickier than it might sound, and is accomplished in two ways:

1. We take in what we consider to be the most adoptable cats, because the more frequently our cats are adopted, the more cats we can foster in a given time period. The AWLMC does not have a strict definition of what constitutes a highly adoptable cat, but in general we want cats who are healthy, young, friendly, well-socialized, have no litter box issues, and are not aggressive. Some other attributes that make a cat more likely to be adopted are being dedawed; doing well with dogs, kids, or other cats; or being a unique breed or pattern.
2. We encourage responsible pet ownership. We generally do not consider litter box problems, allergies, or family situations

Continued on page 6

such as divorce or moving valid reasons to rehome an animal, and generally do not accept the cat, though there may be exceptions. In most of these situations, however, we do our best to help the owner keep the cat, usually through counseling to resolve a given issue. For example, if a pet owner tells us their cat got pregnant and they want us to take the kittens, we first insist that they have their cat spayed, to prevent another litter of unwanted kittens.

Keeping these guidelines in mind, the public intake process works as follows:

1. A member of the public calls or emails AWLMC, briefly describing the situation and leaving their contact information.
2. A volunteer gets in touch with the person. We ask for a full explanation of the give-up situation and a detailed description of the cat, including appearance, age, health, and temperament.
3. We try to find a foster home if the cat is deemed adoptable and the situation is considered one in which rehoming is appropriate.
4. We make plans for an AWLMC volunteer to pick up the cat. The person surrendering the animal signs a give-up form, legally transferring ownership to the AWLMC.
5. The cat enters the AWLMC foster system and remains in our care until adopted.

Public intake is a far bigger job than it appears to be, involving a large investment of time and patience. Steps 1 and 2 can often involve several calls back and forth between the volunteer and the person giving up the cat, with negotiations, counseling, and evaluations every step of the way. But by far, the most difficult part is finding foster homes for the cats. If volunteers can help in any way, it would be greatly appreciated. To learn more about helping take messages and/or making phone calls, please contact Kacey Nolle at (240) 994-8048, or catfostermom@gmail.com. To learn more about fostering, please contact Tara Bertolini at tarabert@verizon.net. ∞∞∞

Understanding the Dangers of Declawing

Jonathan Allen

AWLMC members are all too familiar with the procedure commonly known as declawing. The surgery, properly known as Onychectomy, is probably one of the most controversial topics amongst cat owners and rescue organizations, and for good reason: organizations and humane shelters have at least dozens of stories of cats who, declawed for their owners' convenience, still ended up without a home or family, proving that the procedure is not only ineffective at solving the "problems" that an owner might hope it would, it can also have more serious, longer-lasting consequences.

But many cat owners, fosters, and volunteers who know that the procedure is dangerous and painful may not understand the exact details of declawing as well as the possible complications and long-term side-effects; knowing these can help not only in counseling potential adopters but also giving a gentle nudge to a friend who may be considering such a procedure. It is also essential that volunteer organizations understand laws and ethics surrounding the practice, perhaps providing an impetus to push for more stringent laws in their community. Volunteers should also be aware of alternatives so that they can share them with exasperated owners who might consider declawing their cat. A deeper knowledge of declawing can only mean an organization that is better equipped to rescue cats from unnecessary pain, suffering, and indignity.

The Procedure

As the name indicates, declawing is the act of surgically removing a household cat's claws (though it is sometimes performed on other animals, such as circus lions or dancing bears). A certain perception holds that it is no more harmful than a manicure, but it is a sadly distorted

Continued on page 7

perception, as declawing has nothing in common with a manicure. Any vet who would suggest otherwise is either misinformed or playing down the risks of procedure. A cat's claw is *not* a toenail. It is so closely adhered to the bone that, in order to remove it, a vet must apply general anesthetic and amputate not only the last bone (known as a phalanx) of the cat's front claws, but also the nerve, joint capsule, collateral ligaments, and extensor and flexor tendons.

This painful action is performed on every toe of the two front paws; thus, declawing is not even one simple surgery, but ten separate, excruciating amputations. Known as partial digital amputation in humans, it is so incredibly painful that it has been employed as torture on prisoners of war and serves as a model of severe pain for testing the effectiveness of analgesic drugs in veterinary medicine. On top of this pain, the cat also suffers the agony of having to use their aching paws to walk, jump, and scratch in a litter box, since wheelchairs and bedpans are not an option for a cat.

Some vets offer a Laser technique that is similar to the scalpel procedure, but cauterizes the blood vessels by burning them as they are cut. This minimizes bleeding and swelling, thus reducing complications in the first few days after surgery, but it does not diminish the incredible pain of the amputations, nor does it lessen the long-term consequences associated with having those joints removed.

Complications

The rate of complications associated with declawing is extremely high when compared to other so-called "routine procedures"; one study that followed cats for five months after surgery found that nearly a third developed complications within those five months. Those complications can be severe and life-altering.

Immediate (up to five months after surgery) complications can include:

- Excruciating pain.
- Radial nerve damage, which can lead to lesser feeling or even no feeling at all.

- Bone chips, which can impede the healing process.
- Postoperative bleeding, either immediate or following bandage removal, the latter being very frequent.
- Lameness due to wound infection or footpad laceration.
- Exposure necrosis of the second phalanx, which can lead to further amputation.
- Abscesses associated with portions of the third phalanx, which must be treated by amputation, a surgery that carries a heightened risk of shattering the bone and causing a serious, perhaps fatal, infection.
- Abnormal growth of severed nerve endings, causing long-term, painful sensations in the toes.
- Death from general anesthesia.

Declawed cats are at a higher risk for long-term complications that can severely reduce quality of life or even prove fatal:

- Painful regrowth of a deformed claw inside of the paw.
- Chronic or intermittent lameness.
- Frozen tendons that control the toe joints. These tendons retract after surgery and remain fully retracted for the cat's lifespan.
- An altered gait that can cause extreme stress on leg joints and the spine, leading to damage and arthritis in multiple joints and vertebrae.

As if this wasn't bad enough, there is also a laundry list of psychological effects:

- Surveys have found that declawed cats have more litter box problems. In one survey, 95% of calls about declawed cats related to litter box problems, while only 46% of clawed cats had such problems -

Continued on page 8

and most of those were older cats, many with physical ailments that accounted for the behavior.

- Declawed cats are more likely to become biters as they notice that their claws are missing and turn to biting as a primary means of defense.
- Personality changes are common. A friendly kitten may become gloomy, anxious, or reclusive, never to recover its natural joy and grace.

All of these may result in the cat being permanently locked in a basement, dumped at a shelter, or simply abandoned. Many cats are exiled to a life outdoors because of these unwanted behaviors. People who work with feral cat TNR programs often find declawed cats in their traps—cats that should never have been outside at all.

Ethics and the Law

Incidences of declawing vary from country to country. It is most widespread in the United States and Canada, but public opinion in both countries is slowly turning against the practice, with a few locales, such as West Hollywood, outlawing the practice entirely. A survey of major shelters and humane societies around the U.S. found many who are firmly against declawing, and a vast majority will not adopt a cat to a person who intends to declaw. The SPCA of Los Angeles puts it in no uncertain terms: "We do NOT support, nor condone, the act of declawing cats. It is cruel, unnecessary, and inhumane."

Declawing is extremely uncommon in the United Kingdom, to the extent that most people have never seen a declawed cat. The procedure is considered cruel by almost all British vets, who refuse to perform it save for the rare occasion when it is warranted for medical purposes. Parliament is also currently debating the Animal Welfare Bill, which explicitly prohibits the mutilation of an animal for non-therapeutic reasons, making declawing for other than medical reasons illegal.

Many European countries operate under the auspices of the European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals, which explicitly forbids declawing, and some European countries, such as Germany and Switzerland,

go further, making the declawing of cats *always* illegal.

Alternatives

Declawing supporters may be tempted to wonder, what, then, does a frustrated cat owner do when a cat just won't stop scratching? Luckily, there are safe, humane alternatives to maiming your pet; one popular, relatively inexpensive alternative is the application of vinyl nail caps (marketed under brand names such as Soft Paws and Soft Claws) that are affixed to the claws with nontoxic glue, requiring only periodic replacement when the cat sheds its claw sheaths (usually every four to six weeks).

Scratching posts are an old standby; amazingly, many cat owners do not even know that they should provide a scratching post for their cats. Scratching is a deeply ingrained instinct in cats; if there is no appropriate spot, they will be forced to substitute furniture or other objects, leading to the same complaints that created the demand for declawing in the first place. A vertical scratching post should be at least 28-36" high to allow the cat to stretch to his or her full height. Many cats prefer natural soft wood, such as a section of bark-covered log or a cedar or redwood plank, or posts covered with sisal rope, which is more popular than the carpeted surfaces of many posts.

Another simple option is to use double-sided tape, such as "Sticky Paws." This product has a special adhesive that does not damage the furniture but feels disgusting to the cat's sensitive paw pads. An owner may also throw on a slip cover, or drape a thick towel, fleece, or blanket over the object of the scratching. Cats like the resistance of tight upholstery fabric; this is what allows them to stretch. If they instead hook their claws into material that gives, or immediately pulls off, they will lose interest in no time.

Other options include regular nail trimming, training, or a natural pheromone supplement, all of which can keep healthy, happy cats from ever

Continued on page 9

having to undergo such a traumatic, dangerous procedure. Suggest these to anyone who may be considering declawing and cares about the health and happiness of their pets. ∞∞∞

References

<http://www.declawing.com/>

<http://www.littlebigcat.com/index.php?action=library&act=show&item=002>

<http://community-2.webtv.net/zuzu22/stopdeclawtemporary/>

<http://www.janskids.com/laser.html>

Emergency Evacuation Checklist – Plan Ahead

Roger Gagne

Linda Buel provided animal emergency evacuation suggestions for use in the newsletter. This list is particularly timely as the hurricane season is now upon us as is the memory of Katrina. Preparation can reduce panic in an emergency. Prepare an evacuation kit for your animals now before disaster strikes.

Food — Store at least a one-week supply for each animal. Rotate your stock every three months. Keep a spoon, can opener and spare food bowl.

Water — Store at least a one-week supply for each animal. Rotate your supply every two months. Keep a spare water bowl in the kit. Collapsible water bowls take up little space.

Identification — Keep a collar and tag on each animal; microchipping is best because it's permanent. Keep a current photo of each animal in your kit, with yourself in the picture to prove ownership. Keep health and ID records.

Medications/First Aid — Prepare a basic first aid kit and buy a small first aid book. Include at least one week of any needed maintenance medications. Prepare a collar tag with medical conditions/needs. See www.avma.org/disaster for sources.

Cleaning Supplies — Keep small plastic bottles of dish

soap and disinfectant, paper towels, and small plastic litter bags.

Restraints — You will need harnesses, extra leashes, a collapsible crate or kennel, a tie-out stake or cable run kit, and blankets or towels. See www.uan.org/ears

SEEKING SHELTER - Where will you go?

Find out NOW what hotels/motels allow pets in the event of disaster. Locate a safe place out of the danger zone. This could be as far away as 50 or 60 miles, depending on the disaster. Keep the phone number and address of the hotels in your disaster kit.

Keep in mind, major highways could be closed. Include a detailed road map of your area. Line up a friend or relative outside your geographic area to provide shelter for you and your animals.

Boarding facilities outside your area might take in your animals. Animal shelters may agree to take your pets, but they could become overburdened with abandoned animals very quickly. Rescue groups or foster homes are a possibility. Research now and take maps and phone numbers with you!

When the warning comes, load your emergency supplies first. Put each animal into his own crate and load into the car. The best of buddies may become aggressive in a crisis. Do not leave your animals behind! See www.redcross.org for more Disaster Services suggestions. ∞∞∞

**Please don't forget to donate to
AWLMC:**

http://awlmc.org/awlmc_donate.html

Or, please send a check to:

P.O. Box 7041

Gaithersburg, MD 20898