

BULLETIN

Red Cross lab tech plans to spend retirement helping homeless cats

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by ROD BROWNE

After 29 years as a blood bank laboratory technologist at the Canadian Red Cross, June Humphreys is looking forward to her retirement. However, Humphreys does not intend to just sit back and relax ... instead, retirement will mean more time to devote to her *other* -full-time job."

For the past eight years or so, Humphreys has been an active volunteer with Richmond Homeless Cats, one of the many community-based charitable organizations around the Lower Mainland and world-wide dedicated to helping unwanted, abandoned, and feral (wild) cats. Humphreys has been involved with the group since its inception.

Humphreys is one of five full-time volunteers, and she spends most of her evenings on the phone, taking reports of feral cat colonies or just giving advice. Three or four nights a week she goes out and actually traps cats, in order to take them to the vet for spaying or neutering, vaccination and ear tattooing. On other occasions her group will lend out humane traps and other equipment so people in the community can rescue the cats themselves.

Adult homeless cats are usually released back where they were trapped. Whenever possible, volunteers try to find homes for kittens, but it's difficult because of the burgeoning population of unwanted cats. Richmond Homeless Cats feeds in excess of 340 cats every day. They have a shelter, but it's so full they can't accept any new residents.

Adult cats and kittens are usually boarded at the veterinarian, but occasionally Humphreys has to shelter cats overnight in her carport. She has 10 cats of her own. -That may seem like a lot, until you get involved in this work," she said.

Humphreys used to work all over the Lower Mainland, but more recently she has limited most of her hands-on cat rescue efforts to Richmond, where she lives. -We try to keep a pretty low profile, because we have far more work than we could ever possibly hope to do," she explains. -For example, there are probably 2,000 colonies of feral cats in Surrey, as a guess. You could have a thousand people doing it full-time and it wouldn't be enough. We do just one colony at a time."

In addition to direct intervention, cat rescue groups would like to become more proactive by helping people in the

community get their cats fixed. However, its a huge challenge because many cat owners are either unwilling or unable to pay for the procedure. -Education is the only way to stop the problem," says Humphreys.-The SPCA does it ... they have the money to put ads in the paper and so on ...but its like anything else: how do you educate people? You have to do it one-on-one."

Spay and neuter legislation is another option being actively pursued by cat rescue groups and the SPCA. Coquitlam municipal council recently passed the first bylaw in Canada requiring cat owners to get their cats spayed or neutered. Surrey is expected to follow suit shortly, and similar initiatives are being studied in Vancouver, Burnaby and New Westminster.

In 1987, 7,000 cats were put down in the Greater Vancouver area by the SPCA. It is hoped that spay/neuter legislation will reduce this figure ... in US jurisdictions that have adopted similar legislation, animal shelters have reported reductions of between three and 12 per cent annually in the number of cats that must be euthanized.

Humphreys has been an HSA member since the Red Cross laboratory technologists joined the union in the mid-seventies. Prior to her retirement this August, she was a health and safety steward and an assistant chief steward.

-Its hard to believe that Ive actually retired," she said. -You know, it takes a while to get used to it and stop referring to people as "the people I work with. "

When asked if she is looking forward to retirement, Humphreys replies, -Oh yes, absolutely. But I dont know whether its going to change my life that much."

Richmond Homeless Cats currently spends approximately \$4,500 a month on food and veterinary care. The donations they receive through fundraising efforts often fall far short of this figure, with the difference often carried by their volunteers. If you would like more information, or to make a donation, call 604 271 7729.

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