



# THERE IS HOPE

*Spay neuter clinic offers compassionate care in the fight against animal overpopulation*

By Robin Roenker | Photos by Jonathan Palmer

**W**hen the feral cat population living in the woods behind his Tates Creek area home rose to 17, Dan Lennon of Lexington knew something needed to be done to control their numbers. “When you see little kittens in your backyard, you think, ‘Oh, how cute,’ but when it’s getting to be three or four sets of litters at a time, the numbers quickly get out of hand,” he said.

Lennon knew that feral cats — even brand new kittens — sometimes have a difficult time being adopted in area animal shelters because so many tame, gentle cats are also awaiting homes. So he decided to search for an affordable way to have the feral cats near his home spayed or neutered.

He was referred to the HOPE Spay Neuter Clinic in Versailles, where he was

able to have 10 cats spayed or neutered over the course of roughly three months early last year.

“I had nothing but positive experiences with the staff at the HOPE Clinic,” Lennon said. “They are all animal lovers who just want to help do their part to control the animal population.”

Since taking in the feral cats to be altered, Lennon has not seen new kittens,

**Jacquie Nielson ensures a tidy environment before these cats are neutered or spayed.**

and he has noticed a significant decrease in the group’s overall numbers. “The cat population here has definitely gone down,” he said. “Now I’m down to just five cats still living in the colony. That’s definitely much more manageable. And, now that they’ve been altered, the male cats don’t fight one another. It’s better for the health of the animals, all the way around.”

## **Making an Impact, One Animal at a Time**

The HOPE Spay Neuter Clinic opened

in its tidy, cheerful Crossfield Drive office space in September 2010, the culmination of the drive and passion of a group of dedicated animal lovers such as DeeDee Lloyd, the agency's board president and clinic manager, who wanted to do something tangible to stem the tide of animal overpopulation.

"The core group of us began working together in 2004 to do monthly feral cat round-ups — known as TNRs (trap, neuter, release) — in partnership with VCA/Woodford Animal Hospital and the Woodford County Humane Society," Lloyd explained. "Eventually, we wanted to expand our mission to include spay and neuter surgeries to not only feral cats but also 'owned' cats and dogs, and to animals outside of Woodford County as well. So the idea for the HOPE Clinic sprang from that."

The group sought out start-up funds from individual area donors — whose names are painted on a "Tree of Hope" on the clinic's reception room wall — and has found that their clinic is filling a much-needed niche.

Whereas area veterinarians routinely charge \$150 to \$200 or more for neutering services, the HOPE Spay Neuter Clinic charges just \$50 to \$60 to spay or neuter a dog and \$30 to spay or neuter a cat. In just 2½ years — operating only one day a week, on Tuesdays — the clinic has completed nearly 4,500 spay and neuter surgeries.

The volunteer-run clinic is funded entirely by individual donations and the minimal service fees it charges its clients. Only its veterinarian, Dr. Lorie Fuller, and its veterinary technician, Elizabeth Zambrano, are paid employees. All the other volunteers, roughly 15 each week, arrive dutifully each Tuesday to help shepherd the roughly 35 animals on the schedule that day through



Anesthetized cats await spay/neuter procedures.

the pre-surgery prep and post-surgery recovery periods.

Any healthy dog or cat aged 3 months to 8 years is eligible for the clinic's services. The clinic does not have a residence requirement for its animals, and in fact, has had pet clients from 38 different Kentucky counties. It also does not have a need-based income requirement, though it does offer reduced, or even free, services to those who cannot afford the usual service fees, thanks to donations to its Oliver-Rugby Fund. Created in honor of late horseman Bayne Welker, the fund is named after dogs belonging to his wife, Libby, who is a weekly volunteer at the clinic.

"People may hear 'low-cost' spay and neuter clinic and think of a place that must not be very clean or well-run or have a very good vet," Lloyd said. "We don't fit into that category at all. When people step in, I think they can see right away that we really care about their animals. We are with the animals every second that they are here. We are like a bunch of mother hens."

Every dog and cat that comes into the clinic is given direct, hands-on attention by the dedicated volunteer staff during its entire time there. What's more, the animals have the benefit of being treated by Fuller, a skilled veterinarian who

Left, Dr. Lorie Fuller prepares to neuter a feral cat. Inset, DeeDee Lloyd is president and clinic manager at HOPE.

specializes in spay and neuter services and has performed some 50,000 surgeries over the course of her 10-year career.

Fuller said each surgery takes her only six to ten minutes, depending on the age and sex of the animal. While her efficiency comes from years of practice, she says she “wouldn’t be able to get through as many animals in a day without the dedicated volunteer staff that we have here. They’re like a seamless, well-oiled machine,” she said.

On a Tuesday earlier this year, board member and cat recovery room manager Mindy Fiala and three other volunteers petted and cared for a dozen or so cats that were relaxing after their surgeries with heated, rice-filled socks to keep their body temperatures up. Every so often a volunteer would gently roll the cats over, checking on their temperatures and breathing to insure they were coming out of the anesthesia successfully.

“We realize in the case of the feral cats we may be the only vet these guys ever get to see,” said Fiala. “So we make sure they get all their vaccinations, they get their flea/tick medication. We check their teeth and pull any that may need to come out. We clean out their ears. If they have any wounds, we treat those.”

Sarah Arnold, wife of Keeneland trainer Rusty Arnold, has been a regular volunteer in the HOPE Clinic’s cat room for the past year and a half.

“I am an avid cat lover, and I can’t walk by a cat without petting it or worrying about it,” Arnold said. “So,

**Fuller credits the clinic’s efficiency to the volunteers.**



**Fuller has performed some 50,000 spay and neuter procedures during her career.**

when DeeDee asked me if I would like to volunteer, I said, ‘Absolutely.’ Everyone is there because they love the animals, and I feel right at home there.”

Last year, two cats that were in particularly bad shape came into the clinic. “They looked terrible. They were thin. They had no hair. They had had very little human contact,” Arnold said. After their surgeries, Arnold adopted them as barn cats for her husband’s barn



The HOPE Spay Neuter Clinic, 378 Crossfield Drive, Versailles, welcomes donations of money as well as items needed to run the clinic and care for the animals, including paper towels, hydrogen peroxide, rubbing alcohol, pee pads, distilled water, and office supplies. Donations of lunch foods for the volunteer staff on Tuesdays are also always welcome. For more information about the HOPE Clinic or to inquire about scheduling a surgery or volunteering, call 859-873-HOPE (4673) or email [hopespayneuterclinic@gmail.com](mailto:hopespayneuterclinic@gmail.com).

at Keeneland. “Now, they look great. They’re healthy, friendly, and adorable. I just love them,” she said.

The clinic’s connection with Keeneland has been longstanding. Staff at the clinic have helped spay and neuter dozens of stray cats found in the Keeneland barn areas over the years, even before the clinic was formally established and the group was operating just its monthly TNR days, Lloyd said.

While the group does accept feral cats on its regular Tuesday office days, it also does an extra “Kitty Cat Round-up” day devoted only to feral cats once each month. On those days, the staff may work with as many as 50 or more cats.

As successful as the group has become, Lloyd would like to see the clinic expand its reach even further. She hopes this year to establish a new program to offer free spay and neuter services to pit bulls. The clinic is seeking donations to start a pit bull fund.

“Whenever you go to a shelter, the majority of the dog faces looking back at you are going to be pit bulls or pit bull mixes,” Lloyd said. “There is a stigma with those dogs, and they have a difficult time being placed into adoptive homes. If we can cut down or eliminate some of the reproduction of those dogs, particularly, then we could help out not only the animals, but the shelters as well.”

At the end of every Tuesday, Lloyd and the rest of the staff at the clinic go home knowing that they’ve helped do their part to combat animal overpopulation.

“It’s rewarding work,” she said. “As a pet owner, the most important thing you can do for your animals other than love them is to get them spayed or neutered.” 🐾