



# Witty Kitties, Inc. Newsletter

A Special-Needs Shelter

Late Summer-Early Fall 2005

## Witty Kitties Mission Statement

Founded in 2000, Witty Kitties provides quality care and shelter to cats with specific chronic medical needs within the five-state area we serve.

Our organization is committed to providing low-cost medical care and spay/neuter services for local shelters, rural cat colonies and individuals with multiple cats through Animals All About, a mobile veterinary clinic. We also provide rescue, care and appropriate housing for a variety of reptiles.

As part of our overall service to the community, Witty Kitties works to educate the public regarding proper care of these companion animals and, ideally, to find permanent, quality homes for them.

### Board of Directors

Jenni Doll, DVM  
Torben Platt  
Chris Schoon  
Kathleen Schoon  
Dona Pearce, Editor

### Website Address

[www.wittykitties.org](http://www.wittykitties.org)

## Save the Date! OPEN HOUSE

Saturday, October 29 (see page 7 for details)

## FIV is Not the End of the World

By Jenni Doll, DVM

Most of you reading our newsletters know that a large number of the cats we house and care for have FIV. But many of you may not know much about it. Or, if you do know about it, you don't realize that much of what we thought we knew about it only 15 years ago was wrong.

Well, we have 15 absolutely fabulous FIV-positive cats who are up for adoption. Why would anyone take one in? What does it take to care for one? Let's look at the facts.

FIV, as you may recall from the last newsletter, is in the same retrovirus family as FeLV, and shares some characteristics. However, the specific ways they are transmitted differ, as do some of the ways in which they cause disease.

FIV is primarily spread by deep bite wounds, and so is most common in roaming cats, especially tomcats who tend to be in more fights. Contrary to what was thought only in the early 90's, it is not easily transmitted by casual, non-aggressive contact. The good news is that households with a stable environment and social order where aggressive fighting isn't likely to happen, run very little risk for transmission from one cat to another. There are occasions where an infection is transmitted from an infected mother to her kittens, but these are very rare. The BIG fact to remember here is that cats WON'T give it to each other by touching noses, sharing litter boxes or food dishes. You can't give it to your cat at home if you come to the shelter to give tons of love to those in the FIV room, then go home and pet your cat. Once out of the cat, the virus in their saliva dies once the saliva dries up.

Of course, to minimize the risk of your cat getting FIV, you should not allow access to any cat with the virus. Therefore, this means having him/her neutered (the cat won't want outside to roam, mate, fight for mates), and keeping them indoors.

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A vaccine has just recently become available. Though it is not 100% effective, it is helpful in protecting a cat that may have access to cats with FIV. The big downfall however, is that it will cause the most common blood tests we use to diagnose the virus to become positive, making it difficult to distinguish a true positive test vs. a false positive test in the future.



'Irish'

The most commonly used test for identifying a cat with FIV is an antibody blood test that can be run at most veterinary hospitals. A positive result indicates antibodies toward the virus are in the blood, indicating infection. A negative suggests there are none. There are exceptions to this, yet it would take us beyond the scope of this article to explain them.

So, what happens to a cat that has become infected with FIV? We once thought it was more like FeLV, where many could become sick and die soon after infection. But for most, if they are healthy adults at the time of infection, nothing happens at all for many years, similar to humans with HIV. Infection eventually leads to a state of immune deficiency that hurts the cat's ability to protect itself against other infections, even by everyday ordinary viruses, bacteria, fungi, or other "bugs" that are in our environment. The infections with these secondary culprits are usually what are deleterious to the cat.

The symptoms can be a progressive deterioration of the cat's health, or it may present as recurrent illnesses with periods of relative good health in between. Signs of the disease can appear anywhere in the body: poor coat condition, persistent fevers, anorexia, inflamed gums, persistent diarrhea, weight loss, or cancers of many types, to name a few.

This may all sound very depressing, but if you take a look at all the fat, roly-polly, fluffy cats in our shelter, you'll see it hasn't come close to taking a toll on most of them. The best way to care for cats with the virus is to keep them in as stress-free an environment as possible. Obviously they need to be neutered or spayed, as those hormones can make them pretty feisty. We treat routine problems, do regular dentals, monitor for anything out of the ordinary. Though no

drug has been proven to be a cure for the virus, certain anti-viral agents are helpful at keeping symptoms at bay. We put a tasteless, fairly inexpensive medicine called interferon in the water each morning.

If you adopt an FIV cat — and we have adopted out four so far, three of whom are doing very well — it is best to keep them strictly indoors to avoid contact with other cats. This is not only to prevent spread of the virus, but to keep the cat from getting stressed or bitten, if picked on by another animal. The fourth one, Oliver, was returned due to chronic, intermittent diarrhea. Also, if you have other cats, and you aren't sure about whether fights will occur or just don't like the thought of the possibility of transmission, as small as it is, you shouldn't adopt one unless you don't have other cats who don't have the virus.

What if you have a cat recently diagnosed with FIV, and want another? Or what if you haven't any cats, and want to bring them into your life? Adopt an FIV cat, or two, or three. You will have loving, appreciative friends with whom to pass your days. We can provide interferon for you if your veterinarian doesn't carry it. Routine veterinary exams every 6 to 12 months are important, as with most cats. Keep the teeth clean with routine dentals, as you also should with other cats. Have them vaccinated. When ill, treat them as you would any other cat, yet if routine treatments aren't helping, or the illness is prolonged, then it could be a sign that the virus has begun to take its toll. In these cases, we here at the shelter don't get into heroics, but allow the cat to go peacefully before he/she begins to feel very uncomfortable, as we know a healthy future isn't going to be coming.

Please give some consideration to some former "street toughs" who have mellowed with time and love. Some have scars, and signs of not-so-great pasts, but you'd never know it by their attitudes. They will follow you, sit with you, and beg for lovin'. Have a seat on their couch, and fall in love.



'Morris & Charcole'

## Cats Among the Ruins

By Chris Schoon

In May of this year, my wife Kathleen and I spent three wonderful and rejuvenating weeks in Italy. We started and ended our vacation in Rome, where like any good tourists we devoted much of our time to exploring the ruins of this sublimely beautiful city. During our treks through the ancient sites, we were struck by the number of stray cats that appeared to be eking out a living among the ruins. Our curiosity and concern led us to a local cyber-café and a quick Internet search to find out if there was any kind of organization in support of these apparently stray and abandoned animals.



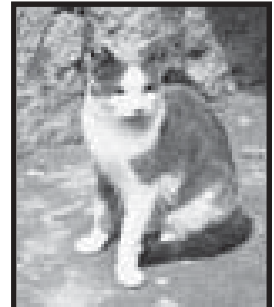
Living among the ruins

Our research happily led us to a cat sanctuary nestled under the busy streets of Rome and inside a veritable cave alongside the ruins of an archaeological site known as Torre Argentina. The site is among the oldest in Rome, dating back to roughly 400 B.C. It consists of a 20-foot-deep pit about the size of a city block, with numerous exposed building foundation stones and columns that were excavated beginning in the 1920s. Down a nondescript set of stairs at the front of the site, we were thrilled to discover a pleasant little courtyard and, off to one side, a low-ceilinged space of about 400 square feet containing a highly organized, clean and well-designed cat shelter. There were four staff-people on duty, some looking after the sanctuary's 250 or so feline guests, some interacting with visitors like us.

Rome is famous for its cats, with many of the local "stars" featured in postcards, calendars and photographs of cats lounging on ancient fragments of marble. Most of the cats residing in the Torre Argentina Cat Sanctuary come

from the surrounding neighborhoods of the city. At the sanctuary, they receive medical attention, food, shelter and love, all made possible by the undying dedication of the purely volunteer staff. In addition to holding fundraisers locally, the shelter also earns money through its own small gift shop. Through its online site and a newsletter, the shelter also reaches out to bring in donations from cat lovers around the world.

Torre Argentina offers spay/neuters, adoption and education to the public while giving quality care and shelter for these animals. They are also involved in maintaining and assisting 50 other cat colonies across Italy - and all of this with no public funding.



One of the cats at Torre Argentina



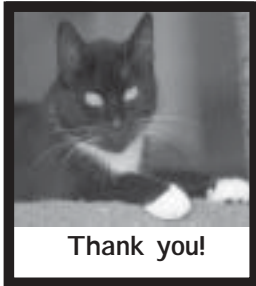
Two of the charges at Torre Argentina

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This experience brought home to us yet again that the plight of abandoned and feral cats is a worldwide phenomenon. Governments here in the U.S. and abroad are more or less unengaged, with no immediate vested interest in dealing with the situation, so it comes down to the actions of concerned individuals who invest their time, energy and funds in an attempt to make an impact on what often appears to be an overwhelming tide of animal suffering.

The inspiring work being done at Torre Argentina reminded us of the vital contribution being made to animal welfare by selfless volunteers and other caring people who saw an unmet need in their community and took it upon themselves to make things better. Whether in the teeming center of Rome or the rural expanses of Eastern Iowa, the efforts of a few concerned citizens can and do truly make a significant, life-changing difference to countless animals who otherwise would have no advocate, no voice and no hope.

For a closer look at the Torre Argentina facility and to meet its colorful assortment of cosmopolitan feline residents, as well as its dedicated volunteers, be sure to drop by their great-looking web site at [http://www.romancats.de/romancats/index\\_eng.php](http://www.romancats.de/romancats/index_eng.php). If you have time, you might want to email them a quick note of encouragement; if you do, please wish them "Buon giorno!" from Kathleen and Chris!



### Wish List

**CAT FOOD - Purina Cat Chow, the original formula in the blue bag, is the favored brand;**

**CANNED CAT FOOD FOR A.M. FEEDINGS - used as treats and for medicating;**

**CAT LITTER - scoopable, please;**

**DONATIONS OF SKILL - carpentry (we'd love to have some cat walks in the shelter). Experienced folks with vet tech and grooming skills for periodic dematting, ear cleaning, etc.**

**VOLUNTEERS - please call to arrange a visit and see just how you can help our furry friends;**

**HOMES for our special-needs animals;**

**PLASTIC GROCERY BAGS; NEWSPAPERS; PAPER TOWELS;**

**SMALL PAPER PLATES;**

**MONETARY TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS - any amount is welcomed!**

### Memorials & Honorariums

In honor of my mother, **Charlotte Grishaber**, for Mother's Day, by  
Valerie Smith

In honor of our mother, **Eleanor B. Warner**, and her June 4 birthday, by  
Margalea Warner and David Crombie

In honor of '**Patches**,' pet of Riley Smith, by Nancy Swisher

In honor of '**Who Me**' and '**Taz**,' by Margalea Warner and David Crombie

In honor of Randy and Judee Albert by Ann Grosscup

In memory of '**Allie Brighten**,' pet of Ronnie Brighten, by Ronnye Wieland

In memory of '**Hobbes**,' pet of Kevin Manning, by Lois James

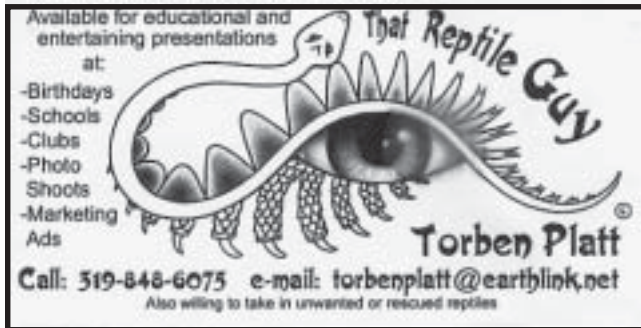
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Honoring or memorializing a person or pet pays a special tribute, and helps our shelter animals who cannot help themselves.



## Exotics Corner

by Torben Platt



Hello to all friends of Witty Kitties, As I write this we are smack dab in the Dog Days of Summer.....Hot enough for ya?

Anyway, I'll start by catching everyone up on all of the critters under my tender care. First the sad news — our largest snake - Big Girl - has gone on to that great jungle in the sky. If any snake deserved to go to a happier place it was her. She was always calm and never once demonstrated her terrific strength in an aggressive manner. She traveled to many demonstrations with me and met a lot of kids where she was poked and prodded. She spent quite a bit of her life in rather inhumane circumstances before coming to Witty Kitties and she passed through several households, but I never saw her exhibit even a hint of annoyance. In fact, she was probably too calm. Many Burmese pythons are avid eaters and can get very excited during feeding time (like her mate Lucifer), but she always seemed to eat just enough to sustain life. After she was dead and her muscles relaxed, she stretched out to over 20 feet in length — quite an impressive serpent. She will be missed.

Lucifer now takes over as W.K.'s biggest snake, at a measly 16 feet. Luckily he is also a very nice animal. I moved a reticulated python into his enclosure after he outgrew his cage in the house, and in a few years he may end up being bigger than both of them. Unfortunately he does NOT share the disposition of the Burmese python at this time.

Good news? Well, as usual in the summer, we move several of the more sun-loving reptiles outside. I convinced Jenni to allow our 6 iguanas to take over the Waterloo kitty's outside enclosure which they happily did earlier this summer. Almost all lizards, turtles, and crocodillians require natural sun light to thrive so we are lucky to be able to provide them

with it, for at least a few months of the year. The outdoor caiman/alligator/turtle enclosure is really neat and we haven't had anybody get out, which is a good thing.

As for the non-reptilian/feline denizens of the shelter are concerned, everyone seems to be doing well. We lost a pigmy goat to some mysterious disease but Amy (a pot bellied pig) made up for it by having 4 super cute little babies. Her delivery of those babies prompted an (almost) all night neutering fest in our yard, during which we did the job on all 3 of our males. A fun, clean, and painless evening it was not.....and I'm talking about the humans involved, not the piggies. Oh well, she won't be having more litters. By the way, the babies are up for adoption.

As part of our desire to educate people, especially youngsters, on which animals do NOT make good pets,



Big Brothers/Big Sisters with Torben & friend!

I've been "touring" as "That Reptile Guy." (note business card above). I presented various reptiles to a group of 250 at the Iowa City Library this summer. What a sound was heard when the largest python made an appearance for the finale! I also got to speak to a "Big Brother/Big Sister" group (see photo) at the Johnson County Fairgrounds. At Camp Courageous in Monticello, I presented "Dimple," the baby pot-bellied pig; "Lucifer," the python; "Hockey," the blue-tongued skink; an unnamed baby alligator; "Lucy," the dog with an endless supply of love; and a copperhead snake who stayed under glass the entire visit. The campers and staff at Camp Courageous are always a joy to visit.

I'll close by thanking all of our friends and supporters who are so good to us and give us so many reasons to continue to care for all of our animals. You're terrific!

Torben

## Witty Kitties T-Shirts Available!



Looking for a way to support Witty Kitties but don't have time to volunteer? How about buying a T-shirt?? T-shirts can be any color you desire, but our logo is either blue or orange. The cost is \$15 for children's shirts and \$20 for adults.

We have a variety of shirt colors with blue or orange logos. Styles include T-shirts, tanks and long-sleeved shirts, and the sizes are: Childrens S, M, L, and Adult S, M, L, XL, XXL, XXXL.

We will special order any shirt you like -- in any color -- at NO added cost! Give us a call and place your order. It's that easy! (319) 848-3238.

## Cat Trivia

A male cat can begin mating when he is between 7 and 10 months old.

All cats are born with blue eyes.

Americans spend more on cat food than on baby food.

Calico cats are nearly always female.

Americans spend more than 5.4 billion dollars on their pets each year.

## Thanks to . . .

Danielle and Emily Jones, our mother/daughter team who have been wonderfully reliable morning cleaning volunteers. You are fabulous, and we appreciate each of you **SO MUCH!**

We also want to thank the Blazing Stars 4-H Club for buying and staffing a booth for Witty Kitties at the Johnson County Fair. It was **REALLY HOT**, but we sincerely appreciate all of their help and efforts to promote our shelter. **THANK YOU!**

Ellie Smith held her birthday party at the Shelter in June, and everyone had a wonderful time playing on the trampoline, petting the animals, and seeing just how big a python really is! **Thanks, Ellie, for gifting Witty Kitties on your special day!**



**"We love our  
volunteers!"**



**PLEASE NOTE:** Jenni Doll no longer has a pet veterinary practice, but she **HIGHLY** recommends Bright Eyes & Bushy Tails. They have emergency services, and they are located on Hwy. 1, about six miles south of Solon. Give them a call at (319) 351-4256.



Charlie Kangaroo-Butt

## Charlie Kangaroo-Butts' Witty Kitties Calendar of Fun!

Attention all social coordinators and Witty Kitty cat lovers! Please paw-mark your calendars for these critter-friendly upcoming events.

### HELP US SPIFF UP THE JOINT! Sunday, September 11, and Sunday, October 23

To prepare for our fall Open House, we're going to set aside **Sunday, September 11, and Sunday, October 23** to prepare the shelter for the Open House on the 29th. We'll be cleaning and tidying up on the 11th, and on the 23rd, we'll set up the haunted house and just generally prepare the shelter for the party.

The cats will need some grooming and spiffing up, as well.

The day will start around 12 noon on each of those Sundays and end around 5:00 p.m. Pizza and sodas will be provided. We could use all the help we can get, so come on out and join the fun!



"Ooh, was that a ghost?"

### HALLOWEEN HAUNTED \$HELTER OPEN HOU\$E PARTY & FUNDRAISER! \$aturday, October 29th

Get ready for the spooookiest night of the year! That's right! Witty Kitties' locally famous "Haunted Shelter" Open House Party will be unleashing all kinds of frightful fun on **Saturday, October 29, 2005**. This year's ghostly gathering will include the must-see haunted shelter experience, costume party with prizes, and a t-shirt/bake sale. (Bake sale items gratefully accepted! Just bring 'em along with you that night & we'll put 'em on sale.) What better way to spend Halloween weekend than with cats, black and otherwise! Of course, all proceeds from the evening will go to help the animals at Witty Kitties, so you'll be having fun AND giving all our lil' creatures a very happy Halloween. The haunted shelter will be open from 6:00 PM to 8:00PM and after that we encourage you to stay and party with the cats. Join us - it's bound to be a monstrously good time!

Bake \$ale!

Co\$tume Party!

Prize\$!

T-Shirts for \$ale!

Haunted \$helter!

**DON'T MI \$\$ THE FUN!**

Witty Kitties  
3133 Roberts Ferry Rd.  
Solon, IA 52333  
(319) 848-3238



## How to find Witty Kitties

Take I-380 to the Swisher/Shueyville exit (No. 10).  
Go east 1.0 mile to Club Road (becomes Curtis Bridge Rd.). Turn right.  
Go 1.0 mile to Sandy Beach Rd. & turn left.  
Go 1.1 miles to Roberts Ferry Rd. & turn right, then left at our 3rd driveway (3133 Roberts Ferry Rd.)

Please call (319) 848-3238 & leave a message to schedule an appointment.

## Gifts, Memorials & Honorariums

Do you have a family member, friend or special pet for whom you would like to provide a memorial or an honorarium? Or, would you just like to give a monetary gift? General donations, memorials or honorariums can be given for a specific person, pet or reason. **Your donation is tax deductible, and we'll publish your memorial or honorarium in a future issue. We'll also send a complimentary copy to the person you honor or the family of the person or pet you memorialize.** Just provide the necessary information below and then send this form back to us in the envelope enclosed in this issue (remember to add a stamp). Thank you! Everything you give helps us care for the animals that are already a part of our shelter and also permits us to help even more animals looking for a second chance.

Gift: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Honorarium for: (name) \_\_\_\_\_

Person

Pet

Memorial for: (name) \_\_\_\_\_

Person

Pet

Send notification to: (name) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
( City, State, Zip)