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## The Cat Room opens in Levy County



The certificate is presented by Levy County Animal Services Director David Weatherford (left) to Bob Echols of Ocala, the founder and president of For Our Friends The Animals at the County Commission meeting on Tuesday morning.



*Photos by Jeff M. Hardison*

**By Jeff M. Hardison © June 8, 2016 @ 1:27 p.m.**

**LEVY COUNTY** – A certificate presentation at the Levy County Commission meeting on Tuesday morning (June 7) and a ribbon-cutting ceremony that afternoon herald the county's new cat room.

The Cat Room at the Levy County Animal Services Department is possible thanks to a \$10,000

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donation by Bob Echols of Ocala, the founder and president of For Our Friends The Animals.



**The group, including the county commission (except for Commissioner Rock Meeks), prepares for the ribbon-cutting.** *Photo by Jeff M. Hardison*

## **LeAF President Bob Levesque holds Kate an 8-week-old kitten that is available for adoption.**

*Photo by Jeff M. Hardison*

Levy County Animal Services Director David Weatherford gave Echols a certificate of appreciation at the County Commission meeting Tuesday morning.

That afternoon, Echols cut the ribbon to officially open The Cat Room for use. That room is now in operations.

The new facility includes 25 cages for stray cats that are ready for adoption. On Tuesday afternoon, there were six kittens and three adult cats available for adoption. The fee is \$40 for a female cat or \$25 for a male cat.



That fee includes testing for worms, feline leukemia, a microchip, spaying or neutering, a rabies shot and having been vetted by a veterinarian.

Dogs can be adopted for \$40 for a male or \$55 for a female. As of Tuesday afternoon, there were 40 dogs available.

The number of cats, kittens, dogs and puppies available for adoption varies from day-to-day.

Here is the website for Levy County Animal Services  
[http://levycounty.org/cd\\_animalservices.aspx](http://levycounty.org/cd_animalservices.aspx).

Echols, who has earned a Juris Doctorate and a Master of Business Administration degree, said he created the name for the foundation – For Our Friends The Animals – from a prayer that is attributed to Albert Schweitzer (Jan. 14, 1875 - Sept 4, 1965).

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“Hear our humble prayer, O God, for our friends the animals,  
especially for animals who are suffering;  
for animals that are overworked, underfed and cruelly treated;  
for all wistful creatures in captivity that beat their wings against bars;  
for any that are hunted or lost or deserted or frightened or hungry;  
for all that must be put death.

We entreat for them all Thy mercy and pity,  
and for those who deal with them we ask a heart of compassion  
and gentle hands and kindly words.

Make us, ourselves, to be true friends to animals,  
and so to share the blessings of the merciful.”



**In these photos provided by Levy County Animal Services, the visitation area and cages are seen.**

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*Photos Provided*

The Cat Room includes a separate area where would-be adoptees can be with their possible future cat alone in a relatively quiet setting.

The visitation room, Echols said, lets the felines play and relax so that they can be seen in a better light than when they were seen in the condition that existed for them before.

Prior to the creation of The Cat Room, adoptable cats were in cages very near to the barking dogs. That kennel area for cats also lacked much in the way of climate control.

The new facility has complete heat and air-conditioning. On Tuesday afternoon, the cool of the room was enjoyed by all of the visitors.

This way, Echols said, the cats to be adopted are less fearful. They are under less stress.

A would-be adopter does not want a skittish, fearful cat, he said. That person wants a normal cat.

The new facility allows cats to be regular cats that are ready to become pets.

Another advantage of the facility, which adds to the health of all cats there, is the ability to quarantine any animal that needs to be separated from the group due to a contagious disease, Levy County Animal Veterinarian Dr. Darlene Esler said.

One group credited with helping in the effort by Echols is LeAF (Levy Animal Friends). LeAf President Bob Levesque was present for the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The staff of Levy County Animal Services, in addition to Director Weatherford and Dr. Esler, are animal control officers Nathan Mercer and Lamar Sears, and office staff members Bridgett Domenico and Crystal Pruitt.

Weatherford said Echols has been extremely helpful to the Levy County Animal Services efforts to reduce the number of cats and dogs that must be euthanized annually.

In addition to this \$10,000 cat room, Echols has donated \$400 a month for vaccines, microchips and other veterinarian needs, Weatherford said.

Echols said he is thankful to be able to help and to be a true friend to animals.