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**Needles may be neutered;**  
***Free spay and neuter program for community cats***  
***planned***



**Needles is a male community cat. Seen here, he walks in Jemlands – an unrecorded subdivision in Levy County.**

## **Story and Photos**

**By Jeff M. Hardison © Nov. 22, 2017 at 10:57 a.m.**

**LEVY COUNTY** -- The fate of a feral male cat who wanders across The Ink Pad property and sojourns through the unrecorded subdivision of Jemlands in the unincorporated portion of Levy County between Carter's Crossroads and Fowler's Bluff may include neutering, according to information shared at the Levy County Board of County Commissioners' meeting on Tuesday morning (Nov. 21).

Needles was named that by Jeff M. Hardison, one of the people who gives him food and water. Needles scored this name, because he blends into the pine needles found in some parts of Jemlands.

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**Seen here on Tuesday afternoon (Nov. 21), Needles walks near the leg of a person who gives him food and water.**



**While Needles has no qualms about his outdoor pet human holding him for a better mug shot, this relatively feral feline can only participate in the program in a few months if he is trapped and transported in that manner -- rather than in a cat carrier.**

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**Needles demonstrates that he wants to become an indoor cat and officially be some person's pet as he shows his skill at following directions from cat trainer Jeff Hardison. 'Needles is a great cat,' Hardison said. 'I wish he could become adopted by some person. However, our two cats are the extent that Sharon and I can care for indoors.'**

As for Needles having the ability to create kittens by finding a fertile female cat, those odds will turn to nil if Levy County Animal Services starts a program in early 2018 as may happen (and if a person can bring himself or herself to trap and transport this particular cat to and from Bronson).

In Tuesday (Nov. 21), Dr. Darlene Esler and Associate Director of Gainesville Pet Rescue Chelsea Bower told the County Commission that a grant is anticipated to fund the six-month trial of a “community cat” spay and neuter program once a month.

A community cat is a feral cat that is fed in a neighborhood, but he or she has not been adopted to the point of living indoors. Feral cats that have no caretakers are not going to be eligible for this program, because it requires a person to capture the cat, take it to the animal services location near the waste transfer site between Bronson and Williston, and then return to pick up the “fixed” cat to return him or her to his or her “normal” neighborhood.

Dr. Esler and others believe the program can have an impact to help reduce the need to euthanize stray cats in Levy County.

As it stands in 2017, only 6 percent of the dogs that reach Levy County Animal Services must be euthanized, Dr. Esler said. As for cats, they have a 50-50 chance of either being “put to sleep” or adopted.

Dr. Esler said that with the help of five vet technicians from Gainesville Pet Rescue, she can spay or neuter as many as 30 cats in an eight-hour day. The cost for the techs is about \$500 for that period, and as of Tuesday Esler and Bower believe this project is completely funded with no need for taxpayers' to be burdened.

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**Goldy the cat (and senior mascot of *HardisonInk.com*) Hardison thinks about what it would mean to share space with yet another cat indoors. As it stands, she must tolerate the upstart Inky the cat Hardison.**



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**Goldy strikes a final pose Tuesday afternoon in The Code Orange Office to help people see how cats are a wonderful thing.**



**Upon being called to pose on Tuesday (Nov. 21), Inky the cat Hardison strolls atop a futon.**

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**Inky demonstrates her talent as she prepare to be a feature cat next year for Halloween 2018 promotions of *HardisonInk.com* ad sales.**

County Commissioner Rock Meeks asked questions that led to this information being shared about number of cats potentially helped within a day and the costs. He intimated that a person may want to donate – say \$100 – and he asked if that would help.

Commissioner Meeks was assured that it would help.

County Commissioner asked questions about community cats from Williston and learned that metropolitan cats are eligible for the program as well as those in the unincorporated parts of Levy County.

County Commissioner Lilly Rooks mentioned that there is a program like this on Cedar Key. She was told that island cats are welcome to be in the program too.

Commissioner Mike Joyner said he calls these kinds of cats “alley cats.”

Linda Cooper, a Levy County taxpayer, asked about the fate of community cats that end up being trapped and taken to Levy County Animal Services because some homeowner sees the animal as a nuisance.

Chairman John Meeks told Cooper that once these cats are spayed or neutered, if they must return to Animal Services, then they go to the front of the line for being adopted.

The cats will lose a part of one ear, as they will be marked that way to show they have been made ineffective for breeding.

Dr. Esler reminded commissioners that one female cat can produce four litters a year and that can translate into 60 kittens a year. Those kittens, in turn, can create more kittens and hence the population of kittens and cats can become a bit much.

"The Trouble with Tribbles" is the 44th episode of the American science fiction television series, *Star Trek*, the 15th episode of the second season. It was first broadcast in the United States on Dec. 29, 1967, on NBC.

This episode reflects how some cute, furry animals can cause issues from overpopulation. The starship *Enterprise* arrives at *Deep Space Station K7* to guard a consignment of grain bound for Sherman's Planet. On arrival, a trader named Cyrano Jones (Stanley Adams) gives Lt. Uhura (Nichelle Nichols) a tribble, a small, furry alien lifeform, with dramatic consequences.

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As Dr. Esler mentioned, by feeding community cats and not spaying or neutering them, people are helping to create issues that result from too many cats.

The spay and neuter project for community cats in Levy County is currently anticipated to start in January. Dr. Esler said the success of the project depends on people's participation by trapping cats and bringing them in and then returning them to their points of origin before being trapped.

The traps will be provided by Levy County Animal Services. Cat carriers are not going to be accepted, because as Bower said, a community cat may allow a person to pick it up because that person feeds the cat, when it comes to handling them before they are prepared for surgery, there are claws and fangs to be considered for the vet techs' safety -- and therefore, traps are the single method for drop off and pickup of community cats participating in this program.