

HardisonInk.com

Needles is wounded; *Cat becomes first in countywide program*



In this pre-injury photo, the happy-go-lucky cat is seen walking in an area where he feels safe on The Ink Pad property in Jemlands, an unrecorded subdivision in Levy County.

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © Dec. 22, 2017 at 3:37 p.m.

JEMLANDS – Needles, one of the community cats from the unrecorded subdivision known as Jemlands, suffered from a severe bite wound to his front right leg, and a bite injury to his head on the right side.

The injuries happened between 8:30 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Tuesday (Dec. 19, 2017).

As a result, the cat that previously had been targeted by Jemlands' resident Jeff M. Hardison to be trapped, neutered and returned to the community next month, had his visit to Dr. Darlene Esler expedited.

Dr. Esler is the veterinarian who works in Levy County Animal Services as this county government serves the residents and visitors.

"Needles was happy and running on all four paws to be fed just before I left to cover the Levy County Commission that Tuesday morning," Hardison said. "I gave him food and water, and petted him before I left. When I returned in the afternoon, he was visibly hurt."

The man who is among the area residents that give the cat food, water and outdoors shelter, said this cat is very smart. Hardison scurried to find a method to help this homeless feline receive medical help and become a non-kitten generator.

HardisonInk.com

Needles is seen with his left ear marked so that people can see he is among the neuter and release program for community cats in Levy County. The program is not officially started yet. When it does begin, the



county will provide traps. People will capture cats that roam in neighborhoods and are known as community cats – often making kittens. Dr. Darlene Esler will spay or neuter them, vaccinate them against rabies, take a nip out of one of each of the the cats' ears, and return them to the person who will release them again into the communities from whence they came. In this picture, the hair missing from behind Needles' right ear was required for the doctor to look at and treat the bite wound.



Here Needles is eating some tuna that has a measured amount of liquefied antibiotic poured on it. He will receive seven meals like this to help him remain healthy as he recovers from bite wounds. The cat seems to like dry, crunchy cat food rather than canned tuna, however this is going to be his breakfast for a week. Lunch and supper will be crunchy food.

HardisonInk.com



Needles favors his injured leg as he walks around property where he had strolled just a few days earlier without the significant limp.



Needles relaxes after a nice breakfast late on Friday morning. The wound on his right front paw is visible in this photo. His clipped ear is position to not show it as being different than his other ear.

HardisonInk.com

The veterinarian said marking the cats with a piece of ear being taken off helps people know this cat has been spayed or neutered.

It wasn't until Thursday (Dec. 21) when Hardison took the initiative to capture and transport the cat to Levy County Animal Services after speaking with the county veterinarian.

"I knew Levy County was planning on starting this program in January," Hardison said. "Needles is a prime candidate, because he is a young male cat who has a natural call to help create kittens."

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.

"I asked Dr. Esler how she felt about letting him enter the program early, given that he has no real owner, and I thought he needed to see a veterinarian for injuries. He is a prime candidate for this upcoming program. She agreed to my request."

At the Nov. 21 Levy County Commission meeting, Dr. 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. Dr. Esler and Bower believe this project is completely funded with no need for taxpayers to be burdened.

County Commissioner Rock Meeks asked questions that led to this information being shared. 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 Matt Brooks 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."

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

HardisonInk.com

kittens and hence the population of kittens and cats can become a bit much.

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.

In the case of Needles, Hardison spoke with Dr. Esler about the cat showing symptoms of having a broken leg. After a thorough discussion, the veterinarian agreed to let Needles become the first Levy County community cat to be neutered.

In vetting the cat before the procedure, she found he had apparently been in a fight with another cat. She treated him for that, ear mites, vaccinated him against rabies and neutered him.

Hardison picked up Needles on Friday (Dec. 22) and will be feeding the cat food that will have doses of antibiotics in it for one week.

"Needles is not only a smart cat, but he is a tough cat," Hardison said. "There's no way to know what other cat or dog fought with him. He does go out at night, and he has come back with some marks to show he was on a cat adventure or in a cat battle. These were daylight injuries to his leg and head, though."

Hardison said he endorses the program where people in Levy County will capture, and transport back and forth, community cats to be spayed or neutered.

"Needles has set the bar for other community cats," Hardison said. "With him not having a particular home, he is inclined to cat around and create kittens. Well, at least he used to be. He would have had a few more weeks of doing his part to make more kittens, but as a result of his being injured, that was moved up on the calendar."