**Local woman creates coupons for spaying, neutering pets**

**Fixing a problem**

By Logan Tuttle

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Photo by Brian Smith

Judy Fandrei gets some surprise affection from a puppy outside of the Kenai Animal Shelter on Friday. Fandrei, a longtime veterinarian technician, started the Peninsula Spay/Neuter Fund in hopes of reducing the number of animals in local shelters.

Judy Fandrei, having been a veterinarian technician for the last 10-plus years, started volunteering at the Kenai Animal Shelter a couple years ago because she wanted to do something with animals that didn't have a home.

It was at the shelter she saw a problem.

"I realized what a big, big problem we have with not enough homes for cats and dogs on the Peninsula," she said. "Just being there one day, I was amazed with how many animals came in."

She knew she needed to do something, but it didn't just happen overnight.

Her solution: the Peninsula Spay/Neuter Fund.

"I tried to come up with a program that would work for our community," she said. "I guess I was trying to develop something that might last and would be able to help people."

But first, she had to raise some money.

"Friends and family were very gracious and helped me get started and get a little bit of money in the bank," she said.

Fandrei decided the program would use a coupon system.

"I try to help people that can't afford to spay or neuter their pets, I meet them halfway," she said. "I'll pay up to 50 percent of the cost of the spay or neuter surgery. Fifty percent up to a set limit -- there's a set limit based on the different types of surgery required."

The program is funded by the community, Fandrei said.

"It's not money that's just falling from the sky and never-ending," she said. "I'm kind of like a funnel, I'm trying to help us who care about the homeless animals to help people who want to stop this insane population growth that we don't have the homes for."

For a canine spay, the cost could range from $80 to $250, depending on the size and age of the dog, Fandrei said.

"For a dog neuter or a cat spay, I'll do up to $75, and for a cat neuter up to $50," she said. "That's kind of about half of the average cost of those surgeries."

The coupon system allows pet owners to have the procedure done where they feel most comfortable, whether it be a veterinarian office or the animal shelters.

Brett Reid is the chief animal control officer at the Kenai Animal Shelter. He said that there is a big need for a program like this on the Peninsula.

"There are far too many dogs and cats born in the area, and a lot of people are reluctant to get them fixed," Reid said. "There are far too many litters produced than homes available for them."

Reid said in 2011, the Kenai Animal Shelter was able to adopt out 631 animals, but had to euthanize 730.

"In 2011, we had 1,673 animals coming in to the shelter," Reid said. "So numbers are up across the board. More and more people are voluntarily giving up their animals."

Reid attributed the increased numbers to Alaska's economy.

"I think it's a sign of the economic time, less people are looking for (animals)," he said. "Alaska's boom and bust economy trickles down to the pet population. Our numbers are up."

Fandrei's first contribution was used in February. Since then, she's helped with three dog spays, one dog neuter and two cat neuters, she said.

"And then I have outstanding people that have coupons," Fandrei said.

There are four coupons currently out in the community waiting to be used, she said. For pet owners who want to receive a coupon, they must first fill out an assistance request form.

"That way I know who you are, what your animal is," Fandrei said. "They fill it out and give it back to me and if I have funds I send them out a coupon."

People must be hearing her message. Fandrei said she has 12 request forms out at this time.

Soldotna Animal Control Officer Marianne Clark has been in the animal welfare field for about 38 years, and she too sees a need for Fandrei's fund.

"I cannot support it enough," Clark said. "To me, it's really, really important to get something going."

Clark said that those requesting assistance from Fandrei should consider helping out the fund when and if they can.

"I've told people, 'If you need help today with a program and it's available for you and you're able to utilize the resource, that's great. But tomorrow, if you have a few extra dollars in your pocket, donate, so the program can continue,'" Clark said. "So it's like paying back into what you received."

Fandrei said she will be selling handmade pottery and carvings at the Wednesday market this summer to help raise funds.

"I guess it's an education and awareness," she said. "As much as it is trying to provide financial support, it's to provide awareness that we have a problem."

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**Adopting a mission — Spay, neuter fund to help with unwanted pets**

By Joseph Robertia – Redoubt Reporter

Judy Fandrei plays with two kittens at the Kenai Animal Shelter on Friday. Her time spent at the shelter drove Fandrei to start the Peninsula Spay and Neuter Fund, which helps educate people to the pros of spaying and neutering pets, and can help offset the cost of surgeries for those in need of financial assistance.

Redoubt Reporter

Walking through the narrow corridor between the cage cubicles that temporarily house dogs at the Kenai Animal Shelter is far from a quiet experience. Excited to see a newcomer, many burst into an unbridled display that includes much howling and barking. This noise of canine enthusiasm can be an overwhelming cacophony to some visitors, but it is a sound that speaks to Judy Fandrei.

A longtime veterinary technician by trade, her love of animals drew her to begin volunteering at the shelter, but the experience was more than she bargained for. She was already aware that not all who take in a dog or cat are responsible, lifelong owners, but helping at the shelter, she was exposed daily to how many pets are abandoned or surrendered. Worse yet, she couldn’t avoid the knowledge of what happens to those animals when no one comes forward to adopt them.

“I got to see how bad the problem was and what a recurring cycle it was. People would bring in litter after litter of kittens from the same cat without ever getting it spayed. I’d hear about litters of puppies or kittens on Tradio or see people with them out front of Fred Meyer,” she said. “I couldn’t stop thinking about it. I couldn’t sleep at night. It was very painful for me.”

Of the 1,673 animals handled in 2011 at the Kenai Animal Shelter alone, 730 of them were euthanized. Many dogs and cats that ended up at the Soldotna Animal Control facility met a similar fate. Outside of city limits many other animals that were never caught or claimed by anyone met grizzly deaths from starvation, being hit by vehicles, predation by wild animals or by being killed by people who viewed them as a nuisance.

Fandrei wanted to change something, anything, to make things better for these animals, but didn’t know how or where to begin making a difference beyond what she was already doing. She, herself, couldn’t adopt or save all of the unwanted pets.

Then came what some might call serendipity. Fandrei calls it Doris.

“It all started with her. She was a gray and white cat that came into the shelter. She was sickly, but managed to give birth to four kittens the next day. None of them made it due to her compromised health, but we were able to keep Doris alive and nurse her back to health,” Fandrei said.

After weeks of foster care under Fandrei, Doris eventually grew healthy enough to be spayed, ensuring she wouldn’t be bringing any more unplanned kittens into the world. Not long after she had the procedure, she was returned to the shelter and was adopted out.

“That was the impetus to start,” Fandrei said, referring to the Peninsula Spay and



A kitten peers through its cage at the Kenai Animal Shelter. According to Fandrei, in 7 years one unspayed female cat and her offspring can produce 420,000 cats.

Neuter Fund she started at the end of 2011. “Instead of just getting upset, I wanted to do something. Even if it’s just saving one dog or cat’s life a month, that is a success. That is making a difference.”

The fund is dedicated to “ending the needless euthanasia of homeless and unwanted companion animals by encouraging owners to spay and neuter their pets.” It works partially though education. Fandrei has printed and disseminates informational pamphlets citing the health benefits of spaying and neutering animals. Included are some tough statistics, such as: In six years one unspayed female dog and her offspring can produce 67,000 puppies, and in seven years one unspayed female cat and her offspring can produce 420,000 kittens.

The fund also works by financially assisting those who cannot afford to have a pet spayed or neutered. After being referred by a veterinary clinic or animal shelter, Fandrei has pet owners fill out an assistance request form to understand what their needs are. If she has money in the fund, she provides pet owners with a voucher for a discounted spay or neuter procedure that is accepted by all local veterinary clinics.

“I really view this as a team effort between me, the clinics and shelters, and the community. It’s a hand up, not a handout. It’s worth 50 percent of the cost of a spay or neuter, and only a spay or neuter — not vaccines or any other medical procedures,” she said.

Since the cost of procedures can vary from clinic to clinic, as well as varying depending on the size and age of the animal, Fandrei said that the vouchers will only cover up to $100 for a canine spay and up to $75 for a canine neuter or cat spay.

There also is a limit of three animal vouchers per family, and the coupons expire within 30 days of being issued.

“I didn’t want any waiting that could lead to dogs or cats going back into heat,” she said.

In developing the fund, Fandrei met with pet-related agencies and organizations from Anchorage to Homer. Several of them gave her the seed money to start assisting with surgeries in February, along with other financial assistance from her own family and friends.

“A 2-year-old pit bull named Haley was spayed. That was the first one, but since then we’ve done a total of three dog spays, one dog neuter and two cat neuters, and I have two dog spay vouchers that are still outstanding,” she said.

Fandrei said she hopes to continue to grow the fund to help as many pet owners as possible. The number of pets that can be helped will be determined by the level of support the fund gets.

“I know there are a lot of pet lovers on the peninsula, and I meet a lot of people who, after finding out I volunteer at the shelter, tell me, ‘I’d love to help, too, but I just can’t,’” she said. “Well, this is a way that they can help.”

To learn more about the Peninsula Spay and Neuter Fund, call 907-690-2723 or email peninsulaspayneuterfund@gmail.com.

Tax-deductible donations to the fund can be made at Wells Fargo (account No. 7861883044) or at Bridges Community Resource Center in Soldotna. There also is a donation box at the Kenai Animal Shelter.

**Spay and neuter fund a great idea**

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When one stops and thinks about all the social problems in the world we can't have much of a daily impact on, the list can get to be rather lengthy and overwhelming.

But there's one problem we can help control with just a little more attention and a few extra resources -- local pet overpopulation.

Unfortunately our local animal shelters are overpopulated with animals and in some cases more pets are euthanized than can find homes each year. The key to helping solve this population problem is simple -- spay or neuter your pets.

But many area dogs and cats aren't spayed or neutered and that proceedure can cost money -- anywhere from $50 to $250 depending on the size, sex and type of animal. That's why we're happy to hear about the Peninsula Spay/Neuter Fund started by longtime local veterinarian technician Judy Fandrei.

Fandrei said the fund works on a coupon system and it will pay up to 50 percent of the cost of the operation to a set limit.

The idea is a great one. We're lucky to have folks like Fandrei in our community -- those who see a problem they can help mitigate and step up to the plate. For that matter, many of the other folks who work or volunteer at local animal shelters deserve some recognition for the time they put in to caring for animals left or abandoned. It's unfortunately a problem that keeps growing and always needs attention.

With that in mind, we'd encourage folks to do three things:

\* First, always have your pets spayed or neutered and if you can't afford it, apply for help through the program. Getting your pet fixed now could save dozens decades from now from ending up in shelters. That burden alone would cost much more than the operation in the first place.

\* Second, when and if you can, please make a donation to the fund. Or, if you see Fandrei out selling handmade pottery or carvings at the local markets this summer to raise funds, consider picking out one for an early Christmas present.

\* Third, remember that you, like Fandrei, can help make a difference when you see a problem. In this case, all it took was some organizational skills and some community donations to start making a difference.

*In short: We'd like to give Fandrei a round of applause for the spay/neuter fund idea and would encourage the community to use, support and help develop it. Future pet overpopulation doesn't have to be a problem if we take a few proactive steps today*