

Local News
Family adopts feral cats at Yankee Silversmith
By Jesse Buchanan, Record-Journal Staff
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WALLINGFORD - When Debbie Hernandez saw several kittens wandering around the Yankee Silversmith property near Route 5, she knew she had to help them.

"I went every single morning and stopped and gave them food," Hernandez said. She and her husband John already had two cats in their Ridgefield Street home, both of which had been abandoned by previous owners.

They eventually took in the feral family of three kittens and one female cat that were living there. Debbie Hernandez said that if she hadn't taken them in, they probably would have been killed by traffic.

John Hernandez said finding experts to help catch and care for feral cats is not easy.

"People don't come out like that and help them," he said, snapping his fingers. "They'll tell you how to do it."

To house the kittens, which are about 4 or 5 months old, he built a heated and insulated enclosure in the backyard of his Meriden home. John Hernandez said he and his wife were already building a netted cage outside for their blind cat to use, but now the enclosure serves as a home for the four new cats.

The heated home was built and added to the enclosure two weeks ago, right before the cold weather set in.

"We were working all the time on this," John Hernandez said. He has built two other cat houses complete with plastic windows and slanted roofs.

After taking a trapping class from Our Companions Domestic Animal Sanctuary in Bloomfield, Debbie Hernandez trapped the 11-year old mother cat in November after getting permission from the Yankee Silversmith's owner, Ralph Mesite.

Mesite said he was happy to give the Hernandez's permission.

"Someone's going out of their way on their own. We've very pleased that she did that," he said. "Our family is very glad that it's being taken care of."

The Wallingford property is 3.5 acres and the Hernandez's were not sure how many cats there were in the family, but they knew they wanted to take them all in.

"We didn't want to break the family apart," John Hernandez said.

Debbie Hernandez said she started getting worried when she no longer saw the kittens on the property after she caught the mother. She eventually found the kittens at a feral cat colony on North Colony Road in Wallingford, where feral cats are fed and spayed or neutered.

Kathy Valente is a volunteer with the Friends of Feral Cheshire Cats that runs the colony and was pleased that the three kittens were taken to a home.

"They're safer where they are now," she said. "Every cat should be in a house on somebody's bed."

The mother cat, Rose, is feral and will not let anybody touch her. The three kittens vary in their attitudes toward humans. One of the kittens, Ruby, is as comfortable with people as any domesticated cat and Debbie Hernandez can pick her up and play with her. The other two are wary but will let themselves be petted.

Debbie Hernandez grew up owning a dog but she said cats require much less care.

"They're good, they're fun to have around," she said. She and her husband also took care of a three-legged cat that died last year and still have a cat that was abused in addition to Rusty, the blind cat. There was no question about taking in new cats that were in need.

"It's just doing our little piece, trying to take care of things," Debbie Hernandez said.

"They're like our children," said John Hernandez.

jbuchanan@record-journal.com
(203) 317-2230