



FESTIVAL

OF TREES

MINDEN

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 23

10am - 6pm

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 24

10am - 6pm

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 25

12pm - 3pm

Minden Hills Cultural Centre

176 Bobcaygeon Rd | Minden

Admission: \$5 per person

(18 and older)

Raffle Tickets: 6 tickets for \$5

Final Draw November 25 at 3pm

Thank you to our Special Santa Sponsor

Up River Trading Co.

MINDEN & HALIBURTON

Minden Hills Santa Claus Parade

Saturday November 24th at 11:30am

Starts at the SG Nesbitt Memorial Arena, follow Bobcaygeon Road through town, ends at Township Office parking lot Milne Street.

Meet Santa afterwards at the Minden Hills Cultural Centre.

Don't forget to bring your letter to Santa! Free hot chocolate!

PLEASE REMEMBER BOBCAYGEON ROAD WILL BE CLOSED AT 11AM.
PLEASE DO NOT PARK ALONG THE PARADE ROUTE.

Christmas Artisan Market

Sunday November 25th 11am-4pm

SG Nesbitt Community Centre Parkside Street

Buy local, handmade products (quilts, felted items, wood products, pottery, jewelry and more) from over 40 artisans.

Lunch options are provided by Irondale Church.

Admission is free



Minden Cat Angels save lives, talk solutions

by SUE TIFFIN
Times Staff

The first thing you see when you drive up the steep hill to Don Kerr's 100-acre property is not the cats. It's more likely the party of bright blue jays, flocking around the food he has scattered for them. Or the rafter of turkeys, going about their business. Or the pigeons, roosting on the roof, overlooking it all. If you're at the house for a meeting with fellow Minden Cat Angels volunteers, you might even have your attention drawn from the cats in their spacious shelter Kerr has built with care, to the deer that gather outside the window while you meet.

"This is my forever home," says Kerr, of the farmland he bought after selling his place on Kushog Lake. "But as far as I'm concerned, it's a nature park, and I love it."

The cats – all rescued from abandonment or homelessness on the downtown streets of Minden – clearly love it, too. Visitors aren't likely to see all 18 cats currently being housed in the shelter together, with some preferring to lounge away from others, and some finding more private spaces to nap in the rooms of the 110 square foot structures. Some are camped out in blankets near scratching posts, or curled together in pet beds. A few sit and watch as people get near them while others make use of the enclosed skywalk Kerr, who taught metalworks out west, designed for them to be active and move from shelter to shelter in safety. Six cats – a mom and five kittens – are being fostered off the property.

Kerr denies he sold the lakefront house for the otherwise neglected animals, but does acknowledge it gave him the capital to do what he wants to do "out here."

It was four years ago that he started helping care for the feral cats in Minden, much like he had done when he lived out-of-province, or when he was helping with a cat rescue in Wilberforce several years ago. He converted the old hen house on his property into the first shelter, and gave the strays a heavily insulated home. Last fall, he added what the Minden Cat Angels volunteers call the condo section.

"My heart's with all animals, but I have a special place in my heart for cats," he said.

When he got involved, there were about 25 cats or so in downtown Minden that

were gathered in two colonies in Minden – one behind Stedmans V&S on Bobcaygeon Road, and the other in the lot beside Dollo's Foodland, next to the highway. They were being fed by another Minden resident and Kerr wanted to help.

"Winter conditions, when it's 25 below, cats aren't built to take that," he said. "It's very hard conditions for them."

Minden Cat Angels, the cat rescue group, formed. About five or six volunteers now put a few hours in at the shelter each week, helping to feed, care for and socialize the cats.

Anne Hodgson has been volunteering for about three years. She and her husband Andrew own the Century 21 building on IGA Road, near where one colony was living.

"We see the feral cats, and it's just sad," she said. "I'm an animal lover, too."

As Kerr and Hodgson are showing the shelter, another volunteer, Monica Hamilton Elliott, arrives with styrofoam plates she has seen at the grocery store that she knew would be helpful for feeding time at the shelter. She's been volunteering with Minden Cat Angels for about half a year, though she has strict instructions from her husband to not bring any cats home.

"Coming here, it gets me a bit of a fix," she said.

Since opening, Minden Cat Angels has taken in 62 cats.

"We've had some beautiful adoptions," said Kerr.

Two were adopted by people in Toronto who later sent pictures of the strays-turned-pets living a good life. Another adoption resulted in a Christmas story that Kerr likes to tell.

"A lady phoned me up from downtown Minden, that there was a cat they'd been feeding for a couple of weeks, and it was meowing in distress," said Kerr. "It was going down to minus 25 that night. So she wanted to know if she could bring it up, even though we're full, and we said, 'sure, we can.' It had quite a bad injury, it had been attacked by another animal or something. So we took it in."

After posting a photo of the orange cat, named Julian, to the rescue group's Facebook page, a couple quickly took to him.

see VOLUNTEERS page 9



Monica Hamilton Elliott, a newer volunteer with Minden's Cat Angels, has been learning the names and personalities of almost 20 cats taking shelter with the cat rescue group. "It's critical," she said of the shelter. "It's absolutely critical." /SUE TIFFIN Staff

Volunteers put in hours each week

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"It was an instant bond," said Kerr. "The cat actually came out of the cage, got in the guy's arms and just purred. When they got the carrier out, the cat actually walked into the carrier. None of my cats would do that."

"It's quite a process, actually," laughed Hodgson.

"It was our amazing Christmas story and we've had other stories like that," said Kerr. "Cats ... know."

Minden Cat Angels will also adopt cats to people looking for barn cats, but only if the animals will be supplemented with food and provided a warm shelter over the winter. The volunteers are very particular about who is able to adopt and insist the cats go to a good home.

"As of a year and a half ago, we'd basically cleaned all of the cats out of downtown Minden," said Kerr.

But, now the shelter has reached its limit, and Hodgson said that Paulmac's Pets has taken in about 66 kittens in the past year. On the day they spoke to the *Times* in September, the Minden Cat Angels volunteers said they had received calls about seven cats in the past two days alone.

"Our biggest problem now is people dumping cats and irresponsible people abandoning cats," said Kerr, his kind and gentle nature clearly shaken by the wanton act. "The sad thing is, four of these cats are [from] tenants that have been evicted, and they're leaving their cats behind ... The landlords called up, 'I've evicted this tenant, there are two cats left behind, can you take them?'"

"Pumpkin has some allergies and health issues," said Hodgson. "He was left behind with a cat and two other dogs in the house. The SPCA took the dogs. I don't know what happened to the other cat."

Minden Cat Angels works closely with Paulmac's, which can take in kittens but not adult cats, as kittens are popular and quicker to find homes. Boxes taped closed have been left at Paulmac's, next to a nearby dumpster, and two cats were abandoned at the Scotch Line dump.

"They were clearly pets because you could just pick them up," said Hodgson. "They were so friendly."

"So we have two major problems," said Kerr. "One is people dumping cats and kittens. And the other is owners abandoning their pets. People should realize when they take a cat in, it should be a lifetime obligation."

"People don't spay or neuter their cats, and then they dump them," said Hodgson.

She cites the spay/neuter program offered in Highlands East, in which homeless and feral cats are prevented from reproducing.

"They're paying for that, and we would love it if Minden Hills would look at that down the line, too," said Hodgson. "That would be really helpful for us, and I think we could help get things under control."

"What we're pushing for on top of that is to get some sort of, in the future, low-cost spay and neutering set up for low income families," said Kerr. "The problem is, there are families in Minden, they can't afford to get the cats spayed or neutered. The cats have kittens, and what do they do with them?"

"It's a critical issue in this area," said Hamilton Elliott. "It's really necessary. We are all obviously animal people and we're just absolutely beyond appalled. I'm horrified to think of people who just dump animals when they're no longer needed or convenient or whatever."

Kerr said in many cities across the country, a trap-neuter-return program is in place.

"It's a lot easier than running a shelter," he said. "When there's a colony of cats, they



A handful of devoted volunteers like Anne Hodgson, left, and Monica Hamilton Elliott, right, help rescue Minden's abandoned and feral cat population, but are quick to point out the dedication of Don Kerr, middle, for his efforts in providing shelter for the animals.

trap all the cats in the colony, bring them in for a couple of days, get them all spayed or neutered and then put them back in the same colony. They have people who continue feeding the colony. So at least the colony isn't getting bigger. That would actually be an easier option for us, rather than bringing cats up to a shelter and trying to find homes for them."

One female cat, given two years, can multiply to 250 cats, according to Kerr.

"The kittens are ready to have new ones at nine or 10 months," he said. "It can escalate that fast. That's why the spay and neuter is so important. If they aren't spayed and neutered, it just goes out of control."

Kerr said the township of Minden Hills has been "very good" to the Minden Cat Angels, offering a one-time grant of \$3,000 after Kerr made a delegation to council about the situation in 2015.

Hamilton Elliott, who pauses to pick a piece of catnip that she offers to Callie, watching from the skywalk, said the cat shelter being run by Kerr and his volunteers is so needed.

"We come from Toronto and of course they have a really extensive and fairly decent animal shelter system there for animals, but up here, there's nowhere," she said. "If you find a stray animal, there's kind of nowhere for it to go."

"My policy is to give them the best possible home they can have while they're with us," said Kerr. "We're not trying to give them permanent homes. We want to move them out. Because for our program to keep going, we have to move cats, and we're almost maxed out."

After a gentle look from Hodgson, he admits: "Well, we are maxed out right now."

When there is a space for additional cats, it's filled within a day or two.

Kerr is humble when, throughout the conversation, Hodgson and Hamilton Elliott laud his giving nature and formidable efforts – in time, in donating, in rescuing – to help.

Hodgson said she gets emails from him at 1:30 in the morning when he's just finished in the shelter, but Kerr waves her away, saying nonchalantly, "it's an hour and a half to two hours a day on my part to feed them."

"The only thing I've covered is the initial cost of the buildings," he said. "Maintaining the shelter, and food and that, people have been very generous to us."

He repeatedly acknowledges the support of Paulmac's and PetTyme, community mem-



Above, cats at the shelter can be adopted as pets or barn cats by approved applicants after an interview process and small donation to the volunteer rescue organization. Below, the shelter is currently housing about 20 cats who have been rescued from the downtown streets of Minden, or from abandonment.



bers who donate time as volunteers and also food and wood pellets used as litter, and the Minden Animal Hospital vet for helping the rescue operation run smoothly.

"All of our cats get along," said Kerr. "We've never had a fight or even a hiss or quarrel with any of our cats."

"I don't know why that is," said Hodgson, then laughing: "It's Don. It's got to be Don."

"When they come in, it's not their territory, but they're accepted," he said. "We all get along OK. I like to think that this is sort of a sanctuary up here. Not just for cats."

He does admit to bringing two of the cats

from the shelter into his own home, where he has reached his limit of five cats, but stresses that he isn't cat-obsessed, and is involved in numerous other hobbies and community efforts. The Minden Cat Angels, which has applied for charitable status, is just where he focuses much of his efforts.

"It's one of the things I feel I can do to help out," said Kerr. "We do it for the cats."

For more information, to help by volunteering a few hours a week, or to adopt a cat, visit Minden Cat Angels on Facebook or phone Don at 705-457-6923.