

HIGH NOTES

Stray No More volunteers address pet overpopulation with spay/neuter program

By AMY WOODS
Notables Editor

Raggs, an 11-year-old dog named for his scruffy-brown appearance, might have become another abandoned pet had it not been for Stray No More.

Raggs' owner was an elderly woman who died suddenly, leaving the animal without a home. But he found a new one with Stray

want to do that to their pet — these are reasons people don't get their animals fixed," she says. "We need to get the word out about our program."

Stray No More offers low-cost spaying and neutering to any owner who applies. In cooperation with more than a dozen local veterinarians, Stray No More will pay for a portion of each surgery.

"People have actually gone through our program and gotten a cat done for \$1," she says. "Whether you're poor or a millionaire, you can go through our program."

While Stray No More spends most of its money on spaying and neutering animals, it also is continuing its rescue efforts. Rescue stories are tragic, but most have happy endings.

One year ago, Ben was found tied to a tree at Lake Osborne. Someone untied him, and Ben roamed around with no food or water until someone else called Stray No More to report the dog.

Hightower says that when Ben was rescued, he had intestinal worms, heart worms, mange and an ear infection. His medical bills exceeded \$1,500.

Today, Ben lives with Sue Werling, one of a handful of foster owners who care for rescued animals until they are adopted. Stray No More does not — and will never — operate a shelter, Hightower says.

About to celebrate its sixth anniversary, Stray No More boasts 250 volunteers who are focusing on the spay/neuter program.

Hightower says she is proud of her group's accomplishments (she won the "Animal Kindness Award" in 1998 from the Palm Beach County Commission), but admits the pet-population problem is far from being solved.

"There's nowhere for these dogs and cats to go," she says. "We still need people to rescue the animals that are there, but we need people to stop the problem and keep them from reproducing and needing to be rescued in the future."

For information on Stray No More and its programs and services, call (561) 683-4537.

■ High Notes is a human-interest feature that runs weekly. To make suggestions for this column, please contact Amy Woods at (561) 820-4935 or awoods@pbpost.com



Sue Werling, Sue Shearouse and Sandy Hightower (from left) helped rescue Ben from Lake Osborne. Ben is up for adoption.

No More volunteer Sue Shearouse.

"It's important for people to make plans for their pets," Shearouse says.

That's one of many messages the nonprofit organization is trying to convey in an effort to make a dent in the number of stray animals in Palm Beach County. The other messages:

- Spay and neuter your animals.
- Educate children about pet overpopulation.
- Find foster homes for unwanted dogs and cats instead of leaving them at a shelter.

Sandy Hightower, a physical-education teacher at Lantana Middle School, founded Stray No More after she and a friend helped rescue 50 dogs following Hurricane Andrew. Since then, the group has rescued more than 875 animals, and has spayed or neutered more than 400. Of the 875 that were rescued, two — one dog and one cat — were neutered when found, Hightower says.

"People are not educated; they have no money; they don't