



# Witty Kitties, Inc. Newsletter

A Special-Needs Shelter

Fall 2004

## History of Witty Kitties by Jenni Doll, DVM

Like so many projects, Witty Kitties has been a work in progress all the way. Although first recognized by the State of Iowa as an incorporation in January 2001, its beginning originated the day an extremely shy stray cat named 'Trixie' was caught in a live trap near Sandy Beach Road in 2000.



As a traveling veterinarian concentrating on shelter work, I have been exposed to the reality of the pet overpopulation problem for many years. In Iowa most strays, especially cats, are never adopted into homes. Initially I began taking in strays in my own rural neighborhood. I also took litters of unwanted kittens from farms and shelters that I traveled to. At the time, I kept them in a spare bedroom and a screened-in porch at my former residence.

When it became apparent to me that the large numbers of cats were beginning to overflow into my own animals' living spaces, my first husband and I decided to build a small shelter in our garage. With \$1,500, we had a small 300-square-foot shelter built. It consisted of three rooms that were insulated and ventilated. It included clear plexiglass walls between the rooms, floor-to-ceiling ramps and shelves, and a large north-facing window. It was during this time that I met Kathleen Schoon, who became the first volunteer at the then unnamed "Witty Kitties" shelter.

Finding homes for healthy kittens was never a problem, especially since they were spayed or neutered, vaccinated, and tested negative for serious viral diseases prior to their adoptions. However, the shelter was accumulating kittens and cats that had more chronic problems: permanent scarring from neonatal upper respiratory infections, birth defects, injuries, and two typically lifelong -- and often deadly viruses -- feline leukemia (FeLV) and feline immunodeficiency viruses (FIV).

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### Editor's Note

Welcome to the charter issue of the Witty Kitties, Inc. quarterly newsletter! We hope you enjoy learning all about our special shelter.

If you are one of our wonderful volunteers, we thank you so much for your devotion to our cats, kittens, and assorted animals.

Please share your newsletter with friends or let us know who should be added to the mailing list. The cat and kitten pictures throughout this issue are of some of our rescued charges.

Now sit back and enjoy learning all about Witty Kitties, from its history to what is happening here and now!

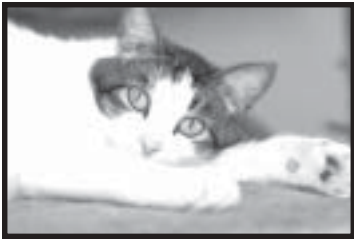
### Board of Directors

Jenni Doll, DVM  
Torben Platt  
Chris Schoon  
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### Website

[www.wittykitties.org](http://www.wittykitties.org)



By the time the shelter was moved to its second location, the garage of my present home, it was obvious that many of the cats would be around indefinitely. That's

when my second husband and I decided that incoming cats needed to fit the criteria of "special needs." We needed to limit the number of cats coming in (the shelter was becoming more like a "dumping ground" for healthy cats people didn't want to take to animal control shelters), and make it more of a long-term sanctuary. By early 2002, over thirty cats were being housed and costs were becoming a heavy burden. Thanks to the gratis work by Attorney Todd Slagter of Simmons, Perine, Albright and Ellwood of Cedar Rapids, IA, the shelter, now officially named Witty Kitties, Inc. obtained tax-exempt status.

With this new status, grants became more available. Kathleen Schoon's first attempt at obtaining a grant was to the Miccio Fund, with the hope of obtaining money for heating the garage. She was very successful, and a grant of \$1,500 paid for a Reznor heater and propane installation. She and her husband donated the 1,000 gallon propane tank. After a full year that included a cozy, warm winter, the shelter was too crowded and it was decided that a bigger and more permanent site be made for the kitties.

The first Witty Kitties Open House was held in May 2003. Despite the cold, windy and rainy day, it attracted numerous cat lovers and resulted in almost \$1,000 in donations. This public interest provided enough encouragement so that building of the new shelter began that same month inside a shed on our property. By September the first cats moved in, and by October the new shelter was essentially complete. An additional \$5,000 grant from Miccio was provided, as well as almost \$1,000 from another open house. Other individual contributions totalled \$7,000. The total cost of the new shelter was \$35,000. There are four spacious rooms; each has

ventilation, outdoor access to large enclosures, large windows, a laundry room and a large common play area for the cats and their visitors.

Though the total bill of the current shelter is still being paid off, monthly donations of money and materials help to pay for the ongoing costs of caring for all of the cats. A regular stream of volunteers provide much-wanted attention for the kitties, and we even have a reliable crew of "pooper scoopers" in Annie Tye, Kathleen and Chris Schoon, Torben Platt, and me!

Since the first Witty Kittie, 'Trixie' (who, after spending a year in an adoptive home came back to live permanently with us), the shelter has found homes for 105 cats and kittens. Another 22 have a permanent home outdoors at the farm of Chris and Kathleen Schoon, now referred to as 'Witty Kitties North.' Cats have come from Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Illinois and Michigan. Sadly, because most of the cats/kittens have illnesses, it is a reality that many of them live out their short lives here. Though another 49 have died while at Witty Kitties, we know we have given many of them a better home than they had previously, as well as a happy, albeit short, life.

Currently, Witty Kitties has 54 cats and kittens available for adoption. There are other cats with FeLV, FIV, some with skeletal birth defects, some who are blind, some with balance problems, and some who are just "odd" in their own way.

Not surprisingly, our ongoing project has taken on other causes as well. Thanks to the passionate interest in all animals, permanent residence has been provided to a number of goats, geese, rabbits, potbellied pigs, emus and an assortment of llamas. The eclectic mix provides an entertaining attraction for all who want to pay a visit.

The kitties have graciously allowed a portion of their space to be inhabited by some non-feline adoptee wanabes — iguanas, pythons and a handful of other reptiles. The pet overpopulation problem extends

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well beyond just cats and dogs. Anyone wanting a rejected iguana need not look hard, as Witty Kitties typically has about ten at any given time. They enjoy a beautiful sunroom in our home.

Witty Kitties, Inc. continues to change all the time. One thing that doesn't, however, is the fact that the cats' and kittens' happiness is our priority. If you visit, take a little time to sit down on one of the couches in a cat room. You'll be thrilled by the kisses and purrs you receive from the inhabitants. They'll let you know they have it good here. By the time you leave you'll even wonder who is benefiting more from this place. . . you? . . . or the kitties?



## President's Message

by Kathleen Schoon

Have you ever bottle fed a baby raccoon? Tucked a possum in for the night? Rubbed elbows with an emu? Ever wondered what it's like to befriend a ferret or ladle out something luscious for a likable llama? Have you ever experienced the extraordinary moment when an abused cat or neglected puppy makes the ultimate leap of faith — and decides to trust you, rewarding you with a velvety purr or a brief paw-touch of thanks? All of these animals, and experiences, have been a part of my life during the past four years of volunteering at Witty Kitties. And I'm happy to say that, yes, you too can "share the love" — by checking out the many opportunities to become one of our cherished Witty Kittie volunteers!

How does being a Witty Kittie volunteer work? Basically, any way you want it to. If you can come by for fifteen minutes once a week just to sit, pet, and/or brush some of our affection-hungry kitties, great! If you can spare half an hour to help us feed the felines, scoop litter boxes or mop a floor, that's helpful, too. Whatever time and energy you can offer, all the critters at the shelter —human and otherwise — will be more grateful than words or meows can express.

Over the past year the numbers of wonderful folks who volunteer at Witty Kitties has grown by leaps and bounds. We never could have finished our greatly improved, new shelter space without all the extra volunteer hours that some very dedicated people put in during the project. If you're an animal lover who'd like to put your principles into cat-scruffing, ferret-hugging, pooch-patting (and, all right, poop-scooping) action, please call (319) 848-3238 and leave a message with your name and phone number. I'll call you back to set up a convenient time for you to drop by the shelter to meet the critters and get a brief orientation. After that, you'll be welcome to come and go as you please on whatever schedule works best for you (we do ask that all children under the age of 12 be accompanied by an adult at all times when at the shelter).

As you may already know, Witty Kitties receives no government funding of any kind, and all of our operating expenses are covered by charitable donations, with shelter maintenance and daily chores covered by many, many hours of deeply appreciated work by our volunteers. Don't have spare time to spare? Then

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we hope you'll consider a monetary donation to Witty Kitties or a donation of much-needed supplies like scoopable litter or cat food (please see our Wish List in this issue)! As you can imagine, it takes an enormous amount of litter and food each month to keep over seventy cats happy and healthy.

In closing, I would like to say 'thank you' yet again to all of you who have been coming to our shelter so faithfully with food, goods, hard work and unstinting affection. We are enormously grateful, and, as you can see from the showers of love and affection you get from all of our feline residents, each and every Witty Kitten is grateful, too. And to those of you wondering if volunteering is right for you, give us a call and find out! I think I can safely promise it will be the most rewarding call you'll make all year!



- \* **Cat Food (Purina Cat Chow is the favored brand)**
- \* **Cat Litter - scoopable**
- \* **Donations of skill - carpentry, plumbing, etc.**
- \* **Volunteers - please call to arrange a visit and see just how you can help our furry friends**
- \* **Homes for our special-needs animals**
- \* **Plastic grocery bags, newspaper, paper towels, small paper plates**
- \* **Monetary tax-deductible donations -- any amount is welcomed!**
- \* **Web Master needed to update existing web site and keep information current on site.**

To those of you already helping in any way -- **THANK YOU** for all you do!

### **Cat Facts**

95% of cat owners admit they talk to their cats.

A cat can be either right-pawed or left-pawed.

A cat can jump as much as seven times its height.

A cat cannot see directly under its nose. This is why the cat cannot seem to find tidbits on the floor.

A cat has 230 bones in its body. A human only has 206 bones.

### **We Give Thanks**

*We are grateful for every donation we receive, and we want to especially thank Eleanor & Tom Dvorchak, Cynthia & Janak Adikhari, the Miccio Foundation & The Hazel Meeks Foundation for their generous gifts & grants.*

## From the Trenches

by Annie Tye

Welcome to the trenches! My name is Annie Tye and I have been working for Witty Kitties for over a year now, although it certainly doesn't seem that long. It's a great job, and the cats are really a joy to be around.

I am a student at the University of Iowa and I'm majoring in Pre-Vet and Biology (with a minor in Microbiology). Someday I hope to have my own shelter with an ambitious young person helping to man it while I do low-cost spays and neuters like Jenni.

While it's very sad when one of our wonderful cats dies or has to be euthanized, as in the recent case of our dear little Peanut, we know that in the midst of our sadness, we provided an environment for that animal that not only met their basic needs, but provided love and lots of attention in a safe atmosphere.

I encourage everyone to come and hang out with the cats; honestly, you can have a more intelligent conversation with some of our cats than you can with many people! If you have been wanting to volunteer and make the world a better place, give Witty Kitties a call. You'll be glad you did!



## Calling All Webmasters!

*Do you love designing and maintaining web sites? Do you enjoy volunteering your time and talents? Then the Witty Kitties' web site is one you'll love! We need help, and if you've read this far, you'll know we all do what we do for the beasties out of love and devotion in order to better the lives of animals who deserve a second chance. The pay may not be great, but the rewards are fabulous! If you want to maintain our existing site and improve upon it, please call (319) 848-3238, leave your name and number, and we will contact you.*



*What a wonderful, ongoing gift for the shelter this would be!*

## Exotics Corner

by Torben Platt



By now, you know that everyone involved with Witty Kitties and the production of this newsletter has a deep and abiding love for animals. Well, I'm no different. Special-needs cats are the main focus of our organization and shelter, but they are not the only animals we try to help. We also take in various exotics that need homes. Many of these creatures end up with us for the same reasons cats and dogs do; people acquire them as cute little babies and then find they aren't as much fun to have around when they reach adulthood. Cute little green iguanas purchased as neonates at local pet stores can grow to be six feet long with claws, tails and (sometimes) bad attitudes. People decide it would be cool to have a python or an alligator, but as they grow the "coolness" wears off and it becomes quite a chore to care for them. Is this situation the fault of the animals? Absolutely not! However, they end up paying the price. Witty Kitties tries to provide a place for these animals to live out their lives as comfortably as possible. We currently house ten adult iguanas, six turtles, two savannah monitor lizards, three caimans, two HUGE burmese pythons and some smaller reptiles, in addition to pot-bellied pigs, pigmy goats, geese, ducks, hedgehogs, prairie dogs and other assorted beasts who are no longer wanted by their previous owners.

I must confess there has always been a special place in my heart for reptiles. I am personally responsible for most of their care. People tend to look at you askance when you admit to liking snakes; many ask me, "why?" Well, there are many answers to that question, but I would rather show you than tell you. We would be happy to give people tours of our facility. I also enjoy bringing some of these animals to schools or camps or anywhere people would like to have a chance to meet them and, perhaps, learn something about them. Feel free to contact Witty Kitties to arrange a tour or appearance. Thank you!

## Witty Kitties T-Shirts Available!

Christmas is just around the corner, and if you have someone on your list that loves cats but is hard to buy for, look no further -- they would probably love a Witty Kitties T-Shirt.

T-shirts can be any color you desire, but our logo is either blue or orange. The cost is \$15 for children's shirts and \$20 for adults.

We have the following shirts on hand:

- \* Black long-sleeved shirts with an orange logo;
- \* White long-sleeved shirts with an orange logo;
- \* Black tanks with an orange logo;
- \* White tanks with a blue logo; and
- \* White short-sleeved T-shirts with a blue logo

Sizes: Childrens S, M, L, and Adult S, M, L, XL, XXL, XXXL.

We will special order any shirt you like -- in any color -- at NO added cost!



## Camp Courageous by Jenni Doll, DVM

Part of Witty Kitties, Inc.'s mission is to educate folks, especially children, on the seriousness of pet ownership and how much of a responsibility it is. We discourage owning some of the more difficult species, such as iguanas (they need a lot of space as they grow to several feet long and require appropriate diet and lighting); alligators/crocodiles (dangerous once full grown); and some of the larger pythons (need an inescapable room, appropriate food and can be dangerous). To educate folks about these animals, we pay visits to schools, daycare programs and camp groups, and allow them to see first-hand what incredible creatures these are. We also hope that in the course of educating folks on the natural history and care in captivity of these animals, we also entertain them.



“Big Girl” (Torben is at right of picture)

The visit to Camp Courageous this summer was such a visit. Torben, our son Joseph and I traveled to the camp in Monticello, Iowa, at the request of Steve Faschnacht, a camp assistant director. Steve and his wife had attended several Witty Kitties events and were extremely valuable in helping raise money at the most recent Open House by bringing a dunking tank.

The animals we brought were the largest Burmese python we house, “Big Girl,” a blue-tongued skink, a boa constrictor (a red-tailed boa), and a few ‘regular animals’— “Buster” and “Lucy,” our dogs. The most exciting part for me was finding a container for “Big Girl” as she is over 17 feet long (measured at the camp). After brain-storming at some farm supply and hardware store container aisles, we used a 100 gallon garbage dumpster on wheels.

At the camp, we had a terrific group of about thirty campers’ and counselors’ attention. “Lucy” was her typical self, jumping into wheelchairs, onto laps, and giving all of her love to campers only too happy to be on the receiving end. “Buster” roamed the crowd in search of food. Then the show started. Torben showed the skink (named “Hockey”) explaining how he is one of the few easy-to-care-for reptiles available as a pet, how to care for him, and where he comes from naturally. Then he brought out the 5 foot boa, and explained how these snakes are more difficult to care for, but showed how beautiful they are and why they are loved as pets. Finally, “Big Girl” came out of her container, and she caused a strong gasp from the crowd! She must weigh about 200 pounds and is quite a sight. Everyone, if they wanted, was able to get close to the animals and touch them as much as they liked. “Big Girl” was really mellow and allowed herself to be touched and then measured.

The campers were really excited about the entire presentation and didn’t hide their enthusiasm. Even those who chose not to touch them seemed to appreciate them for their beauty. We have plenty more unusual and beautiful animals available for presentations, and we do hope Camp Courageous invites us to come back for another visit.

If you have a group that is interested in learning more about different species and would like your own presentation, give us a call. We’ll be glad to arrange a visit. The best weapon against animal abuse is education — and educating our children is the best way to break the cycle of animal abuse once and for all.



### Gifts, Memorials & Honorariums:

Do you have a family member, friend or special pet for which you would like to provide a memorial or an honorarium? Would you just like to give a monetary gift? General donations, memorials or honorariums can be given for a specific person, pet or reason. Your donation is tax deductible, and we'll publish your memorial or honorarium in a future issue. We'll also send a complimentary copy to the person you honor or the family of the person or pet you memorialize. Just provide the necessary information below and then send this form back to us in the envelope enclosed in this issue (remember to add a stamp!). Thank you! Everything you give helps us care for the animals that are already a part of our shelter and also permits us to help even more animals looking for a second chance.

Gift: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Honorarium for: (name) \_\_\_\_\_  Person  Pet

Memorial for: (name) \_\_\_\_\_  Person  Pet

Send notification to: (name) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

( City, State, Zip)



#### How to find Witty Kitties:

Take I-380 to the Swisher/Shueyville exit (No. 10).

Go east 1.0 mile to Club Road (becomes Curtis Bridge Rd.). Turn right.

Go 1.0 mile to Sandy Beach Rd. & turn left.

Go 1.1 miles to Roberts Ferry Rd. & turn right, then left at our 3rd driveway (3133 Roberts Ferry Rd.)

Please call (319) 848-3238 & leave a message to schedule an appointment.

Witty Kitties  
3133 Roberts Ferry Rd.  
Solon, IA 52333  
(319) 848-3238