

Rescuers establish their first permanent sanctuary for cats

By [LILA FUJIMOTO](#), "The Maui News" Staff Writer



One cat was taken in after a landlord threatened to shoot her. Others were being shot at by someone with a BB gun in a store parking lot.

And an injured kitten was rescued after being swung from a rope tied around its front legs and neck, landing in a woman's car late one night in a Pukalani parking lot.

"We took over. We paid the medical expenses," said Phyllis Tavares, executive director of 9th Life Hawaii, as she cradled the 3-pound brown spotted tabby male who now shows no

sign of the trauma. "He's now doubled in size. This little guy sleeps with me every night."

Tavares envisions growth for the nonprofit organization as well.

With the purchase of a 2½-acre Upcountry property in August, 9th Life has established a permanent no-kill sanctuary for cats that Tavares said is the first on Maui.

Fourteen cats, including the rescued tabby, have been moved to the location, living in a screened lanai, laundry room, living room and bedrooms.

More than 100 other cats, now housed at another leased location in Haiku, will be moved to the property once there are accommodations, Tavares said.

She said the group is hoping to raise \$50,000 to turn a barn into a cattery with indoor and outdoor areas, as well as to build other catteries on the new property. Eventually, she hopes to convert a large laundry room into a surgical suite and recovery area where cats can be spayed or neutered.

"We have got a lot of room here," Tavares said. "What we don't have is a lot of money. We can help as many cats as money allows."

Along with taking in homeless and abandoned cats and trying to find homes for them, 9th Life has provided spaying and neutering for cats in an effort to try to humanely control the cat population on Maui. Since August 2005, more than 300 cats have been spayed or neutered using money from PetSmart and Handsel grants obtained by 9th Life, Tavares said.

We estimate approximately \$50,000.00 to complete this first phase. We need and welcome your monetary donations, gift certificate donations that we can auction on EBay, a small SUV or van for shuttling large groups of cats in for spay/neuter surgeries, cat food, toys, and cat condos. We also need volunteers in the following areas: fundraising, foster parents for kittens, concrete contractors, chain link installers,

electrical contractors, carpenters and roofing and tile contractors. Please call if you can help.

She makes the weekly trips to Kihei with the cats, who have been operated on by veterinarian Roger Kehler of Kihei Veterinary Clinic. "We could not do this without him," Tavares said.

With about three-fourths of the grant money spent, 9th Life this month began asking for a \$25 donation for each cat that's spayed or neutered. Tavares said the fee has been waived when people can't afford it.

Appointments for spaying or neutering through 9th Life have been booked for about one month in advance, Tavares said.

"The right thing is to spay and neuter the cats," she said. "The problem is humongous on Maui. The key is spaying and neutering. That's where the money has to be put because that's what works and killing them doesn't work."

According to Operation Cat Nap, a trap-neuter-return program of Auburn University's College of Veterinary Medicine, an unspayed female cat who has two litters a year with two surviving kittens in each litter could lead to a cat population of 59,049 in five years. The estimate is based on having none of her descendants spayed or neutered.

Ninth Life was founded by Tavares' daughter, Crystal Smith, who has been rescuing cats for about 20 years on Maui.

She contacted the national feral cat organization Alley Cat Allies, learning about the program of trapping and neutering or spaying cats, then returning them to the colonies or areas where they live.

For years, Smith and a core group of friends had been caring for abandoned cats and paying to have them spayed or neutered. "I'm really proud of her because she pushed for that," Tavares said. "There were so many cats to feed, we actually became a nonprofit."

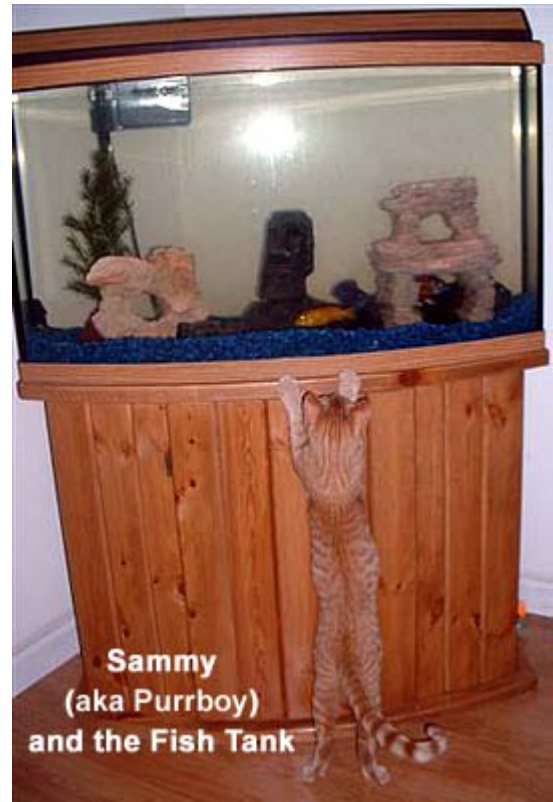
Ninth Life was incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1998, with Tavares one of the original board members.

She took over as executive director in the spring of 2005.

At one time, 175 cats were living on property leased by 9th Life in Haiku, Tavares said. But with the lease set to expire, the group began looking for a permanent location.

An anonymous donor provided the down payment for the new location, Tavares said. "She is most certainly our guardian angel. We cannot thank her enough."

Tavares lives on the property with the cats and Erika Bondy, a caretaker and assistant. Another caretaker lives with the cats at the Haiku property.



Most of the cats are abandoned pets that were dumped in cane fields, beaches and



parks, or near restaurants, condominiums and hotels. While people may think the cats will survive, "if any of them are not sterilized, the overpopulation cycle continues," Tavares said. Ninth Life doesn't disclose the exact location of its sanctuary to keep people from dumping cats that the organization might not be capable of handling – something that happened in the

early years, Tavares said.

"People literally threw them over the fence," she said. "If we can't take care of them, it puts the existing cats in danger."

Tavares said she receives calls daily from people trying to find homes for cats.

"Until we have more room, our sanctuary is full," she said.

The organization has cats available for adoption, with the guarantee that the group will take back any cat adopted from 9th Life if someone finds they can't care for the animal, Tavares said.

She hopes to reach senior citizens who could benefit from having an older cat in their lives.

"There are people whose pets own them, and that's me," she said. "And there are people who own pets.

"All I ever wanted to be when I was a young girl was a veterinarian, but my family didn't have the money. I'm finally in a position to help animals, and I have never felt so good about anything in my life."

In addition to donations, 9th Life is looking for volunteers to coordinate a program to care for and tame feral kittens and to solicit donations for restaurant meals, hotel stays and activities that the organization has successfully auctioned on eBay.