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# West End WEEKLY

## Wine event for Belleville Area Humane Society helps support "Pets for Life"

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Contributing Writer



The Belleville Area Humane Society once again will host its Wine for Whiskers fundraiser at The Weingarten on Sept. 13.

At the Belleville Area Humane Society's "Wine for Whiskers" fundraiser Sept. 13, friends of the organization will enjoy an elegant affair of great food and wine, music and celebration.

Behind the scenes, though, volunteers will be preparing for a busy weekend of trapping, neutering and releasing feral cats in the Belleville area.

It's an example of BAHS' constant balance of the more familiar side of animal welfare and pet adoption with the nitty-gritty of making life better for all of St. Clair County's cats and dogs – and the people who love them.

"Part of our mission is to prevent overpopulation," says BAHS Executive Director Katie Nelson. "We can't just adopt our way out of this problem."

The agency is committed to a holistic approach to handling animal welfare – preventing unwanted litters of puppies and kittens, helping families keep their pets in the face of obstacles, and adopting out animals who don't have homes.

"It's a big change among animal welfare organizations, toward the idea of 'pets for life,'" Nelson says.

Wine for Whiskers will celebrate this mission, as well as raising money for the activities. Scheduled from 6-9 p.m. Sept. 13 at The Weingarten, it will feature a dinner buffet by Fletcher's Kitchen and Tap, live music and adoptable animals. Guests can participate in a raffle offering \$1,000 worth of restaurant gift cards and a high-end silent auction. Nelson says a highlight of that auction will be a beautiful handmade metal fire pit crafted in the shape of Busch Stadium.

Over the past eight years, "Wine for Whiskers" has become BAHS's largest annual fundraising event. The Weingarten is located at 1780 East State Route 15.

Volunteers will barely be able to catch their breath from the dinner before turning to a weekend-long program to catch and neuter "community cats" – those who don't have a fixed home to live in. These cats are often fed by residents, and have multiple litters of kittens a year, contributing to the feral cat problem in St. Clair County. The unvaccinated animals also can carry diseases.

To combat the problem, BAHS is working with an organization called St. Clair TNR and Rescue and Operation Spot, a Missouri-based mobile van that provides neutering services.

Over the weekend of Sept. 15-17, Nelson says volunteers will place humane traps in areas known to have a high number of community cats, and take the cats they catch to BAHS for neutering. The cats also will receive rabies vaccinations, microchips and will have their ears clipped to signify that they've been altered.

"They'll all be in here," Nelson says, gesturing to the office building on the BAHS grounds. "This will be transformed into a recovery room. I'm thinking of

bringing a cot to sleep on."

Once the animals have recovered, they'll be released back to their neighborhoods. Nelson says this is an important step in stabilizing the cat population in the wild.

"If you remove all the feral cats from one area, and the resources are still there (food, shelter, hunting areas), more feral cats will just move in," Nelson says. "If you put them back after neutering, new cats won't move in and they can't overpopulate."

She says studies show this approach leads to fewer new litters and fewer cat intakes at Animal Control departments and shelters.

BAHS also wants to work with families who want to keep their pets, but face hurdles, such as the cost of veterinary care. The agency has begun holding low-cost neutering and vaccination clinics. Working with Operation Spot and Swansea-based CARES (Community Animal Resource, Education & Safety Inc.), they book appointments in lower-income neighborhoods, charging \$40 to spay or neuter a pet, give necessary vaccinations and implant microchips.

The clinics help prevent unwanted litters, and make sure pets are getting the basic vet care they need.

"Most people love their animals and want to keep their animals," Nelson says. "Pet ownership can be expensive. We want to help with any problems before people need to give up a pet."

This approach requires the cooperation of lots of different agencies – not just St. Clair County Animal Control, but also groups in neighboring communities. Nelson notes that BAHS is one of 60 St. Louis-area animal welfare organizations that meet regularly to compare notes and coordinate their efforts.

It also requires money, and BAHS has a number of fundraising events planned for the rest of the year, in addition to Wine for Whiskers:

—The Oct. 28 Howl'oween Pet Parade features costumed dogs and walkers celebrating in downtown Belleville. The parade begins at 1 p.m. at Associated Bank, 100 E. Washington St. and ends at Seven Restaurant and Lounge, 7 S. High St. Entry is \$10 per dog; walkers and dogs can win prizes for best costume.

—Glo Bingo will be held Nov. 16 at Bel Air Bowl. The 6 p.m. event will feature more than \$1,000 in cash prizes, along with an emcee and music, raffles and drinks. Tickets are \$20. Register early; Nelson says the event will sell out quickly.

—BAHS will offer its annual pet photos with Santa Dec. 1, 8 and 15 at the shelter at 1301 S. 11th St. from noon-4 p.m. Pets of any kind are welcome.

For information on any of these events, or on ways to volunteer or support the Belleville Area Humane Society, visit the organization's Facebook page or its website at [bahspets.org](http://bahspets.org).

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