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KIT LILLY

HSUS STATE COUNCIL MEMBER
// BY RUTHANNE JOHNSON

SEEDS OF LOVE: It started with a cat named Otis. Kit Lilly adopted the tabby in 1990 from a woman running a shelter out of her home. “He was a lap cat,” says Lilly, “and when I picked him up, he’d put his arms around my neck and just snuggle.”

The two spent hours cuddling, and the close bond made her think of other animals needing homes. When several stray cats showed up on her back porch, she didn’t turn a blind eye. She took two of them to a shelter and adopted a third.

Lilly soon began volunteering at the shelter, where she learned of a small feral cat colony living in an auto parts junkyard. “I didn’t even know about feral cats and how prevalent they are,” she remembers. She helped trap the cats and made sure they received medical treatment and were fixed before being released. Volunteers put straw in the cars to help keep the cats warm.

In 2012, when Lilly retired after 23 years in banking, she chose a different path than most. “I retired to specifically change to animal welfare full time,” she says. “I am one of those people who looks for animals in dark alleys. I just can’t help it.”

GROWING REACH: Lilly’s advocacy grew from her experience with the junkyard cats. In 2002, she founded Charles River Alleycats, a nonprofit that works to reduce feral cat populations in the greater Boston area. It’s now the city’s largest trap-neuter-release group, treating about 1,100 cats a year. At two large shelters where many cats were being admitted, she says, intake is down about 65 percent.

As an HSUS Massachusetts state council member, Lilly helps state director Alexis Fox with networking, making calls to legislators and spreading the word about key issues.

FOREIGN ENTERPRISE: While vacationing in Mexico in 1999, Lilly noticed an over-

whelming number of free-roaming dogs and cats on Isla Mujeres. She learned that while most dogs were owned by residents, the cats were basically on their own.

Concerned, she asked around and was pointed to Delfino Guevara, the island’s only veterinarian. The more she learned about him, the more she wanted to help.

“The man’s a saint,” she says. Of his 1,800 or so cases a year, about half are done free. She’s seen him take braided bracelets and fish for payment. “He’ll just work with what the people can do so the animal receives care.”

Lilly brought traps to help spay and neuter feral cats. She has donated medicine and cat food, and even paid for vet care—like for one little dog whose owners couldn’t afford surgery for his bulging eye.

In 2013, she founded the nonprofit Helping Animals Living Overseas (HALO) to support Guevara’s clinic. She purchased land near the dilapidated rental space where the clinic once stood and collected donations to build a new one. “I don’t choose to spend money on spas and stuff like that,” she says. “I’d rather spend it on animals.”



Lilly with Otis

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