

From the heart



From the heart. Pam Huson has opened her heart and her wallet to stray and abandoned animals — including Buddy and Maggie, both rescues that she now keeps as pets. *AMANDA STREET/STAFF PHOTO*
Amanda Street

July 21, 2011 In sickness and in health, one Beamsville woman is committed to caring for animals. Pam Huson heads up Beamsville 4paw Animal Rescue, a group of 10 dedicated animal lovers who open their hearts and their wallets to abandoned, lost and feral animals. It began eight years ago for Huson when the land behind her Beamsville home was sold to a developer. An abandoned barn that sat on the property was home to dozens of cats and other animals who were suddenly left homeless when the four walls came down. Huson, who began bringing home strays to her childhood home in North Pelham at a young age, saw something tragic happening in her neighbourhood. Neighbours who didn't want the pesky cats chomping on their gardens or urinating in their yards began to put out poison for the feral felines. Those that survived would multiply, growing the cat colony. "It was a nightmare to see," said Huson, who began trapping the cats, spaying or neutering them and then evaluating whether or not they could be

homed. Many of the feral cats she had spayed or neutered could not go into home settings, so she set them free where they could no longer contribute to the growing cat population. Others, including an eight-year-old black cat named Buddy she now keeps as a pet, were able to be tamed. "If you can tame a feral cat, you've got the best friend in the world. They are so appreciative of what you have done for them, giving them that second chance," said Huson as Buddy nuzzled against her foot. It hasn't been easy though. One year Huson spent \$22,000 of her own money on rescued animals. The bills add up — spaying and neutering fees add up, as does the cost to feed the animals. Some of the animals Huson rescues, like Gandalf, another cat she has chosen to keep, come to her injured and in need of surgery or other medical care. Gandalf appeared on Huson's doorstep bleeding profusely and with a stump for a tail. The vet figures someone held the orange tabby down and sawed off its tail. "It's horrible what people will do, kids even," said Huson, noting you have to have a strong stomach to do this line of work, or hobby in Huson's case. "We've seen kids using kittens as baseballs and all kinds of horrible things." There have been days when Huson has wanted to throw in the towel. Like last year when all four of Huson's pets, three cats in their 20s and an elderly miniature poodle, died within a year of each other. She didn't even want to look at another animal. "They have a way of finding me," said Huson, who forfeited a night on the town when she saw an abandoned dog on the Queen Elizabeth Way. Huson also keeps plenty of cat food around her home just in case a stray, or lost cat, is hungry. "It kills me to see an animal, any animal, suffering," she said. "There have been times when I think I can't go on doing this. There's too much heart break which is why I keep pictures around to remind me." A digital picture frame in Huson's living room flashes images of cats, dogs and weeks-old kittens. These images are reminders of the good she has done. Beamsville 4paw Animal Rescue is not a registered charity. It is a group of 10 like-minded people who do not want to see animals suffering needlessly. They don't do it for praise or for money, in fact there is no money to be made in this line of work. "Every cent we get goes right back into the rescue," Huson said. So what's in it for the rescuers? "Seeing that perfect match," Huson said smiling. "When you can see the difference you made for that animal, there is no better feeling." To assist with costs, Beamsville 4paw Animal Rescue hosts garage sales every few weeks. Information on their fundraisers can be found on the Beamsville 4paw Animal Rescue Facebook page. They will also be collecting pet food donations for the rescue. For more information contact Huson at or e-mail info@beamsville4pawrescue.com