

Feral Cat Caregiver Nominated for National Award

Yvette Pina's efforts with Chicago's feral cats earned her a nomination for the Presidential Volunteer Service Award.

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Yvette Pina manages four feral cat colonies in West Chicago — trapping, neutering and returning the stray cats and monitoring their progress around her neighborhood. She also educates neighbors and coworkers at the Environmental Protection Agency about feral cats and how to implement trap-neuter-return (TNR) programs. Her dedication to the cats recently earned her a nomination for the Presidential Volunteer Service Award, presented annually to a federal employee for outstanding volunteer service.

The nomination came from Debra Potter, one of Pina's coworkers at the EPA. Pina recently helped Potter deal with feral cats in her own neighborhood. "I wouldn't have known how to care for them or the importance of TNR had it not been for Yvette," Potter said. "Thanks to her and my neighborhood rallying together, we have done TNR and have a small and healthy feral cat colony here."

Pina is grateful for the nomination and for her coworker's willingness to learn more about feral cats. "I think people want to help feral cats; they're just not sure how," Pina said. "I'm always happy to talk to people about where to go, what to do."

Her involvement with feral cats began in November 2006, when she moved into a house on the west side of Chicago. She noticed stray cats in her yard, and became involved with TNR when she found a kitten. PAWS Chicago outreach coordinator Susan Robinson helped her get started. "She told me I needed to learn about TNR," Pina said.

So far, Pina and her husband, Frank, have trapped 150 cats, paying for the surgeries and other medical care with their own money. "It's financially draining at times," Pina said, "but it's very rewarding to see healthy cats as opposed to pregnant or emaciated nursing ferals."