



## People Power BY NANCY PETERSON

Kerry Bartoletti (left) and Lori Ratchelous were drawn together by a shared concern for feral cats.

## Kerry Bartoletti & Lori Ratchelous

**How they met:** Kerry Bartoletti was six when she rescued her first kitten. Years later, she volunteered at the Essie Dabrusin Cat Sanctuary in Beacon, N.Y. Lori Ratchelous was a longtime cat lover who worked for Forgotten Felines, a cat shelter in Clinton, Conn.

Fate brought the pair together in a parking lot in 2006. Since moving to Cheshire, Conn., in 1997, Bartoletti had been working on trap-neuter-return (TNR) projects that included a colony of cats on a restaurant property, while Ratchelous had trapped many cats at the hospital where she worked, finding homes for the friendly strays.

When Ratchelous heard about cats living behind the restaurant, she went to help. "I saw several cats and their shelters and feeding stations," says Ratchelous, "so I returned to the restaurant and asked an employee to give my contact information to the person caring for the cats." That person was Bartoletti.

**An organization is born:** After meeting, the pair combined their efforts to start a TNR group. Their work resulted in Friends of Feral Cheshire Cats (FFCC), which received its nonprofit status in May 2006. The fledgling organization at first had limited success finding local veterinarians to perform low-cost spay/neuter surgeries. But Bartoletti and Ratchelous soon discovered discounted services through the monthly spay/neuter clinics provided by the Central Connecticut Cat Project; Dr. Kristine Matz's mobile veterinary practice, Animal Medical Care; and Naugatuck Veterinary Hospital.

**Finding local support:** Working with local government officials was new territory for Ratchelous and Bartoletti, but they persuaded Cheshire's town council of the merits of TNR. "The town supplied 10 new traps and added a link from its website to our website," says Ratchelous. "We're currently working on featuring our adoptable cats and kittens on the town's public access television station." The group has also found support from citizens: A pasta dinner in 2006 raised \$1,000—

just in time to pay for the TNR of 100 cats and kittens living on a farm. With the help of foster homes and several area organizations, the younger kittens were socialized and adopted. To date, all but five of the cats have been sterilized, and only two litters were born on the farm this year.

Local businesses donated refreshments and raffle prizes for a celebration of FFCC's first anniversary in April 2007. During its first year, FFCC spayed or neutered over 250 cats and found homes for dozens of kittens.

**What the future holds:** After attending a feral-cat workshop taught by Bryan Kortis of Neighborhood Cats—one of a series held by The Humane Society of the United States and funded by the PETCO Foundation—Bartoletti says the pair are reenergized in their work and plan to hold TNR workshops of their own, establish a trap bank, and increase their work with caregivers in other areas.

Learn how you can make a difference for feral cats by visiting [humanesociety.org/feralcats](http://humanesociety.org/feralcats).