



ERIC HASERT staff photographer

Winky Sam, a 2-year-old stray cat, is held by Tammy Barnadoe of Dogs & Cats Forever on Thursday. Winky Sam had one eye removed and has a torn retina in the other, and eventually will go blind.

Disabled cat rescued, now ready for love, local home

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By Megan V. Winslow
staff writer

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The eye was enormous — four or five times larger than it should have been — and despite its removal, the little cat is still going blind.

Now, more than two months after he was found wandering the streets of Port St. Lucie, caregivers at Dogs & Cats Forever are searching for a suitable home for the disabled domestic short hair.

A shelter volunteer had recommended the name “Sam” but, after considering the patient’s condition, a veterinarian proposed “Winky.” A compromise yielded “Winky Sam.”

According to veterinary ophthalmologist Todd Strubbe, a birth defect was to blame for the enlargement of Winky Sam’s right eye, and shelter volunteers scrambled to raise money for surgery to preserve his left eye.

Shelter volunteer Wendy Dougherty sold plants and flowers from her garden at Heathcote Botanical Gardens in Fort Pierce. Eric and Paula Grutka, owners of Ian’s Tropical Grill in Fort Pierce, rewarded donors with restaurant gift certificates.

Combined, they collected more than \$1,300 before an ultrasound revealed that Winky Sam’s left retina was detaching and could not be saved. So the money raised for the surgery was put aside for future medical emergencies at the shelter.

Strubbe said it’s difficult to tell how long Winky Sam will have the use of his left eye, and Dougherty hopes to find a home for him soon, so he can become familiar with his surroundings before he loses his sight completely.

“Obviously, it has to be someone who’s very kind and has the time and will be understanding when he goes blind,” she said.

For now, Winky Sam is a playful, happy 2-year-old who enjoys chasing flies, Dougherty said.

“I went to say goodbye to him, and there he was on a desk, paws on the windowsill, looking to see if anybody was coming,” she wrote in an e-mail.

For more information about Winky Sam, call Dougherty at (772) 337-0923.

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