

Former stray kitten now champions homeless pets

By **KAREN HOLLISH**
Daily News Staff

ST. THOMAS — Some might have called the tiny orange kitten — found starving on the streets of Romania in 1995 — disposable, dirty or dumb.

But to Dellia Holodenschi, he was Radu, and he was worthy of a better life.

The former stray returned with her to St. Thomas, and it was here that he was nurtured back to good health, became the subject of a children's book and turned into a "freedom fighter" for the island's homeless pets.

Recently, Radu was lounging in a sunbeam at Holodenschi's Mahogany Run home as she and several friends planned a fundraiser for Spay Neuter Island Pets.

"He's my inspiration," Holodenschi said, feeding Radu little bits of turkey, while the other women watched and cooed over his cuteness.

Pet rescue is a passion for Holodenschi, who founded the Cat Café Program for the

Humane Society of St. Thomas.

The program stops feral cats from breeding by trapping them, sterilizing them and releasing them back into their territory.

Volunteers then maintain a "cat café" with food and water, so the animals can live out the rest of their lives with their basic needs met.

All proceeds from "Radu the Cat," written by Joyce Doumeng and illustrated by Paul Borghi, will go to the program, Holodenschi said.

The children's book tells the story of how Holodenschi first tried to find a Romanian animal shelter to take Radu, but there were none. Then she discovered Radu had a cleft palate, or a hole in his mouth. Realizing that it was unlikely she would find any Romanian person that would take in the ill cat, Holodenschi decided to bring him back to St. Thomas.

During Radu's treatment for the cleft palate, a veterinarian discovered he had a feline condition very much like Down syndrome, Holodenschi said. The condition makes his legs a bit shorter than usual, and it makes



Daily News Photos by KAREN HOLLISH
Dellia Holodenschi, right, and her best friend, author Joyce Doumeng, cuddle Radu, the subject of the book "Radu the Cat."

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Fundraiser tonight

Fans of Radu and his animal-helping mission will gather tonight at Old Stone Farmhouse for the Evening Eggstravaganza Event. The party, which starts at 6:30 p.m. and goes until 9, costs \$50 a person and includes food, wine and prizes for all. All proceeds go toward preventing pet overpopulation and the work done by the Spay Neuter Island Pets program and the Humane Society of St. Thomas. Call **513-1854** or **998-5309** for more information.

Radu, the Internet sensation

Radu's round face recently won \$6,843 for the Humane Society of St. Thomas.

His photo took second place in the 2011 Spay Day Online Pet Photo Contest, a virtual event sponsored by the Humane Society of the United States and Humane Society International. He earned 5,350 votes in the one-day contest, according to the organizations' website.

Radu's owner, Dellia Holodenschi, said the money will fund the spaying or neutering of 60 animals on St. Thomas. Some of the animals will be stray or feral cats, as Radu once was, or they will be owned cats and dogs whose owners need help paying for the surgery, Holodenschi said.

For financial help spaying or neutering a pet, call **775-0599** or **513-1854**.



A former stray from Romania, Radu has become a "freedom fighter" for the homeless pets of St. Thomas.

Radu a little less cautious than Holodenschi's other cats are around strangers, she said.

Today Radu is almost 16 years old, and he spends his days happily moving from cat bed, to scratching post, to blanketed spots under the sun. Holodenschi is unabashed in her affection for the cat, who went being from being a scrawny, homeless kitten to the love of her life.

"Sometimes," Holodenschi said, "as with a human being, all they need is a chance."

Learn more about Radu and his book — "Radu the Cat" — at www.raduvi.com.

Copies of his book can be purchased for \$5 from Blade and Key, Purely Paws, Dolphin Dreams, Caribbean Surf Shops, Red Hook Mail Service, Home Again, Southern Exposure, Dockside Books, Draughting Shaft, The Daily News, Fish Face, Fresh

Produce, All About Your Pets, Adventure Center and the gift shops at Limetree, Bolongo and Frenchman's Reef and Adventure Tours.

— Contact reporter Karen Hollish at 774-8772 or email khollish@dailynews.vi

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