

East Bay residents donate for care of kittens

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Article Last Updated: 07/21/2007 02:51:45 AM PDT

SAN RAMON — Winston Churchill once said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."

East Bay residents gave generously, to the tune of more than

\$4,000 in the past three weeks, to help cover the medical costs for two kittens injured in an accident last month.

The donations ensured Sammy and Rocky a safe place in the home of Jeff and Karen Westin, a San Ramon couple who decided to adopt the kittens.

Hoping for a few contributions, the Westins asked the community for help with the veterinary bill and were surprised to see an overwhelming response.

"It's been absolutely amazing. People helping cats they don't know for people they don't know," Jeff Westin said. "It tells you that there are a great amount of people here with good hearts."

Karen Westin said they were only expecting a couple of dollars here and there, which made it even more of a surprise to see some people donating hundreds of dollars.

One contribution came courtesy of St. Louis Cardinals manager Tony La Russa and his wife, Elaine, who co-founded the Walnut Creek-based Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation.

"It really touched our hearts to see how people reacted to two little kittens," Karen Westin said.

The kittens were injured when they got stuck in the radiator fan of the Westins' sport utility vehicle. Jeff Westin rushed them to Bishop Ranch Veterinary Center where they received immediate care only after he agreed to be responsible for the medical costs.

Facing limited options, the Westins adopted the kittens, who are now resting comfortably in their new home.

But rest might not be the right way to describe it.

Rocky was a bit timid at first — a condition attributed to the permanent neurological damage he suffered in the accident — but has since come out his shell and has taken a liking to the Westins' other pets, particularly senior housecat Ping.

Not to be outdone by his brother, Sammy — who lost an eye and a leg in the ordeal and has another leg that is broken — runs around as if nothing was wrong.

"Sammy was shy with the stairs at first, but now he trucks up and down them like he has four legs," Jeff Westin said.

The Westins are extremely grateful to have the kittens home with them and want to thank people for their contributions, Jeff Westin said. Although they sought financial support for the kittens, the Westins also wanted to bring awareness about the effects of abandoning injured animals.

"The big thing for us was for people to know it happens," Jeff Westin said. "Cats get run over all the time and people just leave them there. It's horrible."

With the excess funds from the donations, the Westins are working with Bishop Ranch Veterinary to start the Sammy and Rocky Foundation Fund, which will cover medical costs for those who bring in injured animals but cannot afford to pay the vet.

Nancy Brown, client advocate at Bishop Ranch, said the Westins and their kittens have become part of the Bishop Ranch family.

"When they come in, everyone is just so excited to see them," she said. "The Westins are fantastic people, especially for what they did with these little guys."

Neighbor, and animal lover, Nancy Sanzone played a vital role in rescuing the kittens and gathering donations for her friends. Sanzone, who drove Sammy to Bishop Ranch after the accident, is involved with numerous charities and organizations that donated to the Westins.

Michelle Aralica of San Ramon was one of the first to make a donation. She said she was not surprised by the response the Westins received.

"It was more encouraging than anything," she said. "It is obvious that there are a lot of pet lovers in the area, so it was reassuring to see that."

With such a strong sense of community, now all Karen Westin has to do when she has a bad day is look at the dozens of letters she received from total strangers, she said.

"I honestly do not think there is a word to describe the amount of concern and compassion we received," she said. "It's truly one of the most amazing things to ever happen to Jeff and I."