

HUMANE MATTERS

PURR-SONALITIES

Celebrating friends of felines

Model of Mercy

Michael Elan hits the streets to serve strays.

By Sandy Robins

Dressed in white, with long, flowing hair and smoldering good looks, model Michael Elan looks every inch the dashing hero he portrays on the covers of romance novels. But to the hundreds of feral cats eking out an existence on the streets of Miami, he is a modern day St. Francis, a helping hand and a voice of kindness.

Every evening, regardless of how he may be feeling or how inclement the weather, Elan sets out to four different locations to feed and medicate hundreds of stray and abandoned cats that have come to rely on him.

Elan uses his own money to provide about 110 pounds of dry food and 49 cans of wet food to the cats every week. Elan also buys medication for the cats, and has as many as possible spayed or neutered.

"I feed at night because that's when the cats have more confidence to come out. I try and leave as much food as possible, hoping that it doesn't rain and that nobody sweeps it away," Elan said.

"It's not only about feeding and medicating. I try to spend time with them and pamper them too," Elan said. "It's amazing. Some of the cats that have been around awhile allow me to get really close and pet them. Several will even lie down and let me rub their tummies. My feeding routine takes about two hours and I hate it when I have to go home and leave them behind for another night on the streets. The next day, I always check for familiar faces and hope that no one has been attacked or killed during the night. The stress and guilt that overcomes me when one of them dies or is missing is often too much for me to handle."

Elan lives in a small apartment and is limited in the number of cats he can adopt himself. However, he has success-

fully found good homes for many of his feline friends.

"No person or animal deserves to live on the streets. It's a horrible life," Elan said. "Often, people have the misconception that animals can survive. But common sense highlights that it's a fight to find enough food. Also, it is impossible for an animal to stave off disease. And the threat of being attacked by other animals or killed in traffic is ever-present."

But Elan has a dream: He wants to buy a piece of land and create a haven called It's Meow or Never Animal Sanctuary, where his feral friends will be permanently safe and cared for.

To date, the Web site is already up and running and donations are starting to come in.

"Ideally, I would like to construct three shelters," Elan said. "One to house FIV positive cats, one for those that suffer from feline leukemia, and a separate place for the healthy ones."

As a child growing up in Florida, Elan recalls having as many as 26 cats. "They were mostly neighborhood strays," he said. "Back then, no one really pushed the issue of having them spayed or neutered, so they kept multiplying. My special cat was one I called Mommy. I could sit for hours and tell her all my troubles and I knew she understood every word."

"Thank goodness there are more animal rescue organizations than ever before," Elan said. "But still, millions of animals are sentenced to death simply because they can't find a home. It's so sad."



When night falls, Elan sets out to four different locations to feed and medicate hundreds of stray and abandoned cats.

Elan needs funds to get his sanctuary off the ground and, in due course, volunteers to help him supply materials and construction.

Elan isn't concerned where the sanctuary is located. "It's a matter of finding the right piece of land at the right price," he said. Currently, Elan is aiming for around \$15,000 total, a target he hopes to meet by the end of this year. 🐾

Contributing editor Sandy Robins lives in Irvine, Calif.

How You Can Help

To find out how to donate to Michael Elan's shelter project, visit his Web site, www.itsmeowornever.org, for details. While there, read some of the wonderful dedications to cats that he made attempts to save. Even if these cats never had a home, Elan takes comfort in the fact that there was always someone close by who cared.