

BRANFORD COMPASSION CLUB

10/4/19

Eunice Lasala on a rescue mission

See for yourself at Animal Awareness Day, Oct. 6

By Lisa Reisman

BRANFORD — Shoreline citizens, beware: Eunice Lasala is on a mission.

If it means luring you to the Branford Green on Sunday, Oct. 6 with promises of pet pygmy goats, mini-therapy horses, and 13-week-old kunekune piglets for the Branford Compassion Club's 21st annual Animal Awareness Day, so be it.

The 22-year-old feline rescue and adoption organization is facing a financial struggle that, without a fresh infusion of funds, could shutter its 2037 Foxon Road facility for good, the ShoreLine Times reported last week.

But then consider the woman recently honored at a Hometown Harmonies event as a "community icon." Consider her sheer passion when it comes to

causes she believes in.

This is a woman who, before founding the Compassion Club with Friskie Wheeler and Ann Marie Lorello in 1997, for years loaded her old Mercury station wagon with cat food and warmed-up Half and Half, and several times a week drove around town feeding feral cats and trapping them for neutering and vaccinations.

See Mission on A9



Peter Hvizdak / Hearst Connecticut Media

Eunice Lasala, of Branford, founder and past president of the Branford Compassion Club cat rescue organization in North Branford, at the Compassion Club with Tiger, a cat given to the Compassion Club for adoption by a military veteran because he had to transition to a nursing home. Tiger is an American domestic short had tiger with white markings who is approximately 6-years old.

MISSION

From page A1

"They have no voice," said the well-coiffed Branford resident on a recent afternoon at G Cafe Bakery, her enthusiasm showing no signs of wear and tear more than two decades later.

"They lead a desperate life more than any other animal because they have so many predators and not enough food, so they die of starvation or disease or some animal attacking them. We have to help. We have to help all of God's creatures."

Little surprise, perhaps, that Lasala grew up on a big farm in "No-place, North Carolina," as she put it, with a father who raised Angus beef and tobacco, and a mother who, she said, "was probably the most active woman in the community, who believed in getting to know the people around you, working with them, and making the place you live a better place."

This is a woman who, on that reasoning, once walked the length of Boston Post Road from Branford to Guilford cajoling merchants, with her signature Southern charm, to enhance their outdoor premises; who, upon assuming presidency of the Branford Community Foundation, expressed relief.

"People always saw me and ran, because either I was asking them for money for my causes or trying to give them a cat," she told the *New Haven Register* in 2012. "It's nice to be able to give money to others, to those in need."

Among those causes: the Dan Cosgrove Animal Shelter, which she helped found, and of which she is particularly proud.

"With Laura Burban as director, it's become one of the state's best municipal shelters," said Lasala.

Unlike the shelter, the BCC gets no funds from the town or the state. It's entirely dependent on donations. And for the last three years, the expenses are far outweighing the donations.

Lasala recalled the global outpouring for Hope, the black lab-pit



Peter Hvizdak / Hearst Connecticut Media

Eunice Lasala, of Branford, founder and past president of the Branford Compassion Club cat rescue organization in North Branford with Lianne Souchy, director of the Branford Compassion Club on Sept. 27.

bull mix who was found emaciated and near death on Route 1 in March 2017, and was rescued and nursed back to health by the Cosgrove Shelter.

"That doesn't happen with cat people," said the mother of three sons and grandmother of five with a wry smile. "Little old cat ladies don't have much money."

Which was why, in the early years, she ran the BCC out of her Damascus Road home.

"I just told everybody who came in and saw the shredded drapes and furniture, that shabby chic was in," she said.

When All Pets Club came to Branford, Lasala was among those who got them to Airbnb one of its

large rooms as a temporary shelter.

Since 2011, when the full-service brick and mortar Feline Rescue and Adoption Center opened on 2037 Foxon Road in North Branford, the BCC has found homes for approximately 1,600 rescued cats and kittens, according to its website.

The facility, complete with a safe, enclosed "catio" overlooking the lawn and trees, and a hearty band of 60 felineophile volunteers covering the shifts, houses anywhere from 30 to 50 cats at a time, each of which receives a complete veterinary work up.

All that care adds up to an astronomical \$12,000 a month—even,

as Lasala said, "with vets giving us a break." All of which has the BCC "in dire crisis," she said.

That's where Animal Awareness Day, on the Branford Green on Sunday, Oct. 6, comes in. In addition to those mini therapy horses and pet pygmy goats, the much-anticipated event features live music, tasty food, and skills demonstrations by the New Haven Police Department's K-9 members.

Not to mention the Blessing of the Animals, which has clergy representing various denominations, in a tradition honoring St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals.

"That's the highlight every year," Lasala said with her signa-

ture zest. "But really the whole event is a highlight. Everyone has to come."

In other words, Shoreline citizens, consider yourselves forewarned.

The Branford Compassion Club's Animal Awareness Day will be held on Sunday, Oct. 6 rain or shine, on the Branford Green from 12 to 4 p.m.

To donate to the BCC, visit www.branfordcompassionclub.org and click on "Become a Sponsor" to become a Sustaining Sponsor with a one-time or monthly donation from \$10-\$50, or scroll through photos of BCC cats to Support a Shelter Cat at levels from \$25-\$500.