

Locals rescue cat trapped in cistern

By Andrew Oxford

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A small cat trapped in a 20-foot-deep cistern for at least four days has been freed, thanks to a few local residents, an animal rescue organization and a crew from the city of Santa Fe equipped with a big piece of machinery.

Residents of the Estancia Primera subdivision off Camino los Altos first heard the cat's cries emanating Friday from a pipe attached to a culvert.

A girl shimmied down the pipe and found the young male feline.

Neighborhood residents called the Santa Fe Animal Shelter & Humane Society as well as Felines and Friends New Mexico, a local nonprofit whose members rescue cats.

Springing the trapped animal, however, seemed to stump volunteers.

The cistern did not contain any floodwater, but the only way into it appeared to be a narrow, 17-foot-long pipe.

Neighborhood residents and members of Felines and Friends crawled through the pipe and lowered food to the cat for several days.

The organization's executive director, Bobbi Heller, also ventured down the pipe twice Monday and noticed a 24-inch manhole cover on its ceiling. That proved to be the solution to the cat's woes.

A crew from the city of Santa Fe's Stormwater Management Division used a backhoe Tuesday to scrape about a foot of dirt from the top of the cistern and pry loose the rusted manhole cover.



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Felines and Friends Executive Director Bobbi Heller cuddles a young male cat rescued Tuesday from the bottom of a cistern in the Estancia Primera subdivision, where the cat had been trapped for several days as rescuers tried to find a way to get him out. Courtesy photo

After a neighbor lowered a 24-foot ladder into the cistern, a city employee descended with a carrier and pair of gloves, and then carried the cat back to ground level for its first glimpse of sunlight in several days.

Heller took the cat to the Santa Fe animal shelter, where it likely will be available for adoption, according to the nonprofit's staff.

The young male feline was not microchipped, but Heller said it seemed to be someone's pet.

□He was very affectionate, □she said.

Meanwhile, the city of Santa Fe is looking to secure the site so other animals or children are not trapped, according to Heller.

□If a child had gotten in there, the results could have been quite tragic, □she said. □This cat had the ultimate second chance. □