

## Firefighters, police make extra effort to save family cats

By Robert Jordan

Staff Writer

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SAN RAMON — If cats do have nine lives, then Balls, a long-haired black feline, owes at least one of those to the city's fire and police departments.

Three days after being pulled from a house fire, resuscitated by firefighters and rushed to a veterinary clinic in a police car, Balls was released from the Bishop Ranch Veterinary Center on Thursday.

"They weren't just doing their job," said Leslie Nadig, Balls' owner.

"They were unbelievably sympathetic and caring. It wasn't like 'Oh, it's just an animal.' They really showed love and care."

But San Ramon fire Chief Craig Bowen said he and his staff were just doing their job.

Firefighters responded to a fire at Nadig's San Ramon home Monday that started in an overheated dryer and engulfed the garage.

The crew not only worked to extinguish the blaze and ventilate the roof, but they also removed some of the Nadig's personal belongings, including a China cabinet complete with dishes.

They weren't finished, though, and went back in the home to search for Nadig's two cats.

Battling thick, black smoke, firefighters found Balls first and then Pumpkin.

Once retrieved, the cats were hooked up to oxygen by Bowen and retired firefighter Jim Ellis, who was in area, along with paramedics.

"We do everything we can to save lives and families," said Bowen.

"But we also do as much as we can to keep a family together — and that included pets."

"It was unusual to see two cats laying on the lawn with firefighters and paramedics working on them, but they had the ability to do so, so why not?" said San Ramon police Officer Eric Webb.

"It's something you don't see every day."

Webb, who also said he was just doing his job, offered to take the cats, Nadig, Bowen and Ellis to the veterinary center in his squad car.

Racing two cats connected to breathing masks in his patrol car isn't something Webb does every day either.

A phone call ahead by the police dispatch alerted the veterinary staff at Bishop Ranch to be ready for the patients.

Using a special device that is similar to a human inhaler, Dr. James Pogrel and his staff helped ease the cats out of their near-unconscious states.

Pogrel said Bishop Ranch Veterinary Center is equipped to deal with these sorts of emergencies, although usually when animals come in with oxygen masks, it's for heat exhaustion.

Balls spent a day and half recuperating in an oxygen cage, which is like a hyperbaric chamber.

He was a little disheveled and timid before his release, but Pogrel expected the feline to be fine.

Pumpkin, an older cat with asthma, didn't survive, succumbing 12 hours after the fire to the effects of the smoke and heat.

"I can't really articulate the job everyone did," Nadig said.

"I don't know what a firefighter's job description is, but there is definitely a page two."

Contact Robert Jordan at 925-847-2184 or at [rjordan@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:rjordan@bayareanewsgroup.com).