

High-flying feline finds a family

The kitten that jumped off Memorial Bridge in Radford has a new home with the city's spokeswoman and police sergeant.

By [Shawna Morrison](#)

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Matt Gentry | The Roanoke Times

Geronimo, formally known as Jumper, now lives in a house in Radford with cats Jenna (foreground) and Tyson and Jake, a 75-pound German shepherd mix.

RADFORD -- He's not a Jumper anymore.

The little kitten that jumped off Memorial Bridge three weeks ago has a new home and a new name to go along with it.

Now called Geronimo, or Mo for short, the now-9-week-old kitten was adopted by Becky Hawke, the city's spokeswoman, and Radford police Sgt. Charlie Burton.

Mo joined a household of other rescued animals: cats Jenna and Tyson and Jake, a 75-pound German shepherd mix. Hawke said Mo's not afraid to stand up to the big dog, either.

"He had to be tough after what he went through," her father, Mel Hawke, said.

Chris Gardner, a Radford animal control officer, got a call that a kitten was on the bridge about lunchtime May 15 and went to try to rescue it. But as he approached, the kitten jumped, falling about 80 feet to the Bisset Park tennis courts below. Gardner took the kitten to West End Animal Clinic, who named him Jumper and took care of him until he could be adopted.

Mo's only injuries were a scraped paw pad and a punctured lip that may have been pierced by a tooth, Becky Hawke said. Both injuries have healed.

Hawke said she knew the kitten was meant for her when Radford police Chief Don Goodman told her it was a "Garfield cat."

"Take me to it right now," she told Goodman.

"I have always loved orange tabbies," she said.

In fact, Hawke had been looking to adopt an orange tabby when she ended up taking home black-and-white cat Jenna, who is now 5 years old.

Hawke had for months thought about getting another cat. But Jenna didn't get along well with Tyson, Burton's 10-year-old cat, and they didn't want to throw another feline into the mix.

Now that Jenna and Tyson have been snuggling up together to sleep, Hawke figured it was a good time to add a third.

She picked up Mo from West End on May 19, her 25th birthday.

"I was just like all the stars are aligning," she said.

Hawke said Burton may have solved the mystery of how the kitten got onto the bridge, which carries U.S. 11 over the New River between Radford and the Fairlawn section of Pulaski County.

A woman told Burton that Mo may have been hiding in the engine compartment of her car.

That day on the bridge, the woman told Burton, another driver had angrily accused her of throwing a kitten out of her car. The woman said she hadn't. But she knew a stray cat had a habit of keeping its kittens in her engine compartment, she said.

Robin Martin, West End's office manager, said the clinic got many calls from people who asked about adopting the kitten after The Roanoke Times ran a story about the incident May 17.

"There was a lot of interest," she said.

Hopefully, she said, those people adopted other kittens in need of a home.

Hawke said she knew she'd better claim Mo.

"I knew that if I didn't make the phone call someone else would," she said.

Hawke said she used to walk around with Jenna on her shoulder, something she tried with Mo.

"He would just jump off," she said. The first time he did it, she said, she was scared he would hurt himself. "But then I thought 80 feet [compared with] 4 feet, he'll be OK."