

Local's book describes life with Mitten, the crazy cat

by Julie Kink

Contributing Writer

MARINE ON ST. CROIX — It happens maybe once in a lifetime, if you're lucky — that kindred soul who comes

along and stakes a permanent claim on your heart.

For Bill Voedisch of Marine on St. Croix, that soul was wrapped in a furry, four-legged body that wove his way into Voedisch's life back in 1981 and stayed there for the next 19 years, a stray tabby cat that Voedisch and his then-girlfriend Laurie named Mitten.

Subtitled "My Life With a Cat My

Family Says Was as Nutty as Me," Voedisch's just-published book "Citizen Mitten" (\$14.95, East Wind Ink, 2009) is a tender, lighthearted look at life with the cat who's been described as a feline version of Marley, the incorrigible dog made famous by the book and film.

"Mitten was as crazy in cat ways as Marley

apparently was in dog ways," Voedisch said, although he's quick to say he isn't comparing his book to the best-seller. "He (author John Grogan) is a much better writer than I. But I think people who have had a crazy cat who did so many things, or maybe people who are even embarrassed about their relationship with their cat, will enjoy it.

"How crazy was the little guy? Let's see ... I had to extract him from more than one major appliance; he would roll in dirt and essentially change color; he would actually hide from us; outside, he would play detective, flatten his ears and turn into 'stealth Mitten;' and oh, if things weren't going his way, a chomp on a human finger was sometimes in order," Voedisch

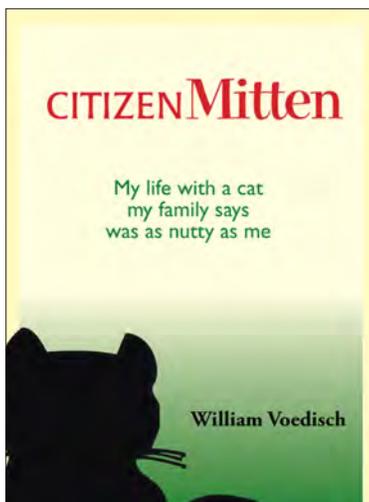
"We all loved him dearly for the nearly 20 years he was with us. But from the beginning, it was not hard to figure out why someone abandoned Mitten as a kitten. He was just so nutty."

— **William Voedisch**

writes on his Website. "We all loved him dearly for the nearly 20 years he was with us. But from the beginning, it was not hard to figure out why someone abandoned Mitten as a kitten. He was just so nutty."

Take the time that Mitten found himself stuck inside the freezer because he was after the delicious frozen trout his "human" had placed there ... or the time he went with Voedisch to a sales meeting at Cragun's Resort and ended up caught overnight in the ductwork under the cabin.

The book, which came out a few weeks ago, started in 2006 as a family memoir. "I thought I would probably print 300 or 400, and any that I couldn't just give away to family and friends, the rest would be given away at my funeral, probably signed with a scribble on



Local's book, continued...

my deathbed," he said. (Voedisch's sense of humor is evident almost from page one.)

Voedisch mentioned the project to publicist Dorothy Molstad, whom he'd known for years. She asked to see a couple chapters and then told him "Do you realize this story might be of interest to other people?" His response: "You're kidding."



Voedisch and Mitten share a snack.

Nevertheless, Bill Voedisch set about the business of writing the story of his "cat of a lifetime" by jotting down a list of potential chapter titles. Molstad eventually led him to an editor, Patricia Morris, and a book designer who would put the project together in a marketable package,

complete with a Website, www.citizenmitten.com. The process took more than three years.

He said he considers himself a wordsmith because of his 26 years working at West Publishing Corp. in St. Paul. But he did seek the advice of his son Rob, a writer who teaches short story writing at The Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis.

"He said ... writing is the hardest thing he's ever done in his life. I said, 'how hard can it be?' Now I know — writing is absolutely hard," Voedisch said.

For anyone who loves animals, "Citizen Mitten" is a labor of love and a glimpse into the profound impact a pet can have on a person's life — in happy times and sad. Voedisch has strong advice for anyone considering bringing home a pet. "When you get your kitten or puppy you also get the responsibility of helping them end their lives," he writes. "Sorry, folks, that's the way it is, or should be. As pets age they can become somewhat inconvenient in their feeding, potty habits, shedding and veterinary needs. So what? Pets should be for a lifetime, not like some piece of furniture you discard when you no longer want it around."

The infamous Mitten died in 2000, and today Voedisch and his wife Laurie care for three house

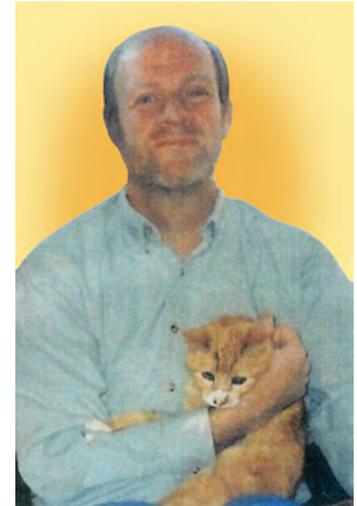
cats, one barn cat and two golden retrievers. They support Hearing and Service Dogs of Minnesota, occasionally caring for one of the dogs when the need arises. They also have a herd of older therapy horses, and Laurie leads a therapy riding program for kids and adults with disabilities at their farm, called East Wind. The program is affiliated with We Can Ride, a nonprofit based in Minnetonka. Voedisch has served on the May Township Board since 1997, is active in his church and works with two other nonprofits.

Asked about people who suffer so terribly when a dog or cat "of a lifetime" dies that they vow never to love another animal, Voedisch offers gentle advice.



Mitten's curious nature often got him trapped inside major appliances.

"The heartbreak and agony of losing a pet can never outweigh the everyday joy of your pet, that you bring to them and that they bring to you. Of course there's going to be heartbreak and sadness at the end, but that's part of living," he said. "When the next pet shows up, you notice the differences immediately. There they are, being themselves, not replacing at all, just being new and unique, to be loved and to love you."



William Voedisch and the late 'Mitten.'