

Bengal Cats Spell 'Alternative Agriculture' For Canton Couple

(Continued from Page B2)

itage, images of wildcats prowling through your living room might scare you away. But in fact the Bengal breed is very widely known for its mild temperament.

Breeders agree that well bred Bengals are quick, curious and sometimes mischievous, but they are also loving, trusting, and enjoy human attention. These characteristics have been selected for genetically as much as the unique spotted pattern.

Still, there is the allure of the jungle to the Metcalfs.

"Fred has always liked wildlife and tigers. He said these are a touch of wildlife in the home," said Beth.

"But they're very much a domestic cat," noted Fred.

The Bengal breed was started only about 20 years ago when researchers in Beltsville, Md. discovered that Asian Leopard Cats were at least partially immune to the feline leukemia virus. Other research projects have grown from this initial study such as if temperament is inherited, or more dependent on environment and to study the genetic components of coat color, pattern and texture, especially the rosetted pattern that appears only in wild species, according to a Jean Mills book, "Breeding Better Bengals."

Another reason for the development is, according to Mills, to "develop a substitute pet for cat lovers everywhere who long to adopt a wild feline."

While the cross of an Asian Leopard cat and a domestic Brown Tabby was the initial mating, subsequent matings were done between the first generation offspring and the Egyptian Mau and the Ocicat. Oddly enough, the first generation males were sterile, but the first generation females were breeders.

For generations following, careful matings were made to screen out the unfavorable characteristics and most reputable breeders will follow the bloodlines closely in both directions, keeping track of the genetics of the parents, but also recording the characteristics of the

offspring.

The Metcalfs have two breeding females, one breeding male, five kittens of various ages, and one pet quality cat.

Maharaja was the first male breeding cat they purchased. He is what breeders call a Snow Leopard Bengal because his coat is more of a grey white with the characteristic black spots.

Maharani, their first breeding female, is a brown spotted leopard. She also has the characteristic brown spots, but has the dominant brown coat color.

There is also a marbled coat pattern, but the Metcalfs prefer the spotted pattern.

The cats and their offspring have competed in various shows in the Northeast and been honored with numerous awards. They have exhibited the best Bengal kitten a couple of times and Maharaja holds the title of Best Seal Point Lynx Bengal Cat of the Year in 1995.

"It's easier than showing horses," said Metcalf. "When the show is over at night, you take the cats right up to your hotel room."

A show quality cat is one with exceptional color and spotting, ideally with rosetted spots or gradual layers of color in the spots. It also has an exceptionally soft pelt and small ears. Temperament is also very important for all Bengals, not just the show quality cats.

Because the breed is relatively new, the show ring standards are not yet set in stone.

What distinguishes a pet quality cat from a show quality cat are the formerly listed characteristics as well as price.

A show quality cat commands a price of \$1,500, while a pet quality cat sells for a third of that price. It's not all gravy, however, as the Metcalfs point out.

"I probably have at least \$100 in each kitten in vet bills and shots before we sell them," said Beth. "I figure if people are going to pay that much money, I want them to have a healthy cat that's been tested and has its shots."

They also have the usual care fees for food and litter and a stan-

dard breeding fee can be \$1,000.

The cats are also registered with The International Cat Association.

"We don't cut corners," said Metcalf. "When we have to travel by plane we don't ship the cat as freight, we take it as carry-on luggage. We often drive to meet people when they're interested in a sale. Buyers for each cat get a vet folder and a bag of good quality cat food."

Finding homes for the cats has been surprisingly easy for the Metcalfs, but they do make sure that the homes they go to are acceptable.

Once when they were visiting Metcalf's mother, they had some cats with them. His mother had

friends over for dinner who wanted to see their cats, so the Metcalfs agreed.

"She wasn't familiar with the breed," said Metcalf. "She held one and was saying that she got rid of all her cats and her stuff and she had no intention of having cats again. When we got home after a three and a half hour drive, my mother had left a message on my machine telling us that this woman wanted the show quality cat."

Metcalf was surprised that she would want the show quality cat because of the price, but his mother assured him that she had told the lady the price of the cat and she still wanted it.

"She insisted on having that

cat," said Metcalf.

Giving up the cats is not always easy, either.

"We had one that was a pet quality that we had spayed. I didn't like her at first," said Beth. "She was always beneath my feet and getting into mischief, but I couldn't get mad at her. Then Fred sold her and I was brokenhearted."

A lady in Williamsport purchased the cat. The lady was very happy with the cat's mischievous personality.

"I like to think we're using our heads. We make certain they're good homes. We're not dumping them," said Metcalf.

Said Beth, "We want people to be Bengal-smart, since this is a new breed."

Quilters' Heritage Celebration April 2-5

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.)

— For the 11th consecutive year, Quilters' Heritage Celebration returns to the Holiday Inn Lancaster Host Resort and Conference Center in Lancaster, from April 2-5. Drawing quilters and quilt enthusiasts from all over the United States and many other countries, the focus is visual . . . quilts, quilts, quilts! More than 400 quilts on exhibit join with over 80 functions, classes, lectures, fashion show and even quilt bingo along with 75-100 merchants to provide four knowledge and fun-filled days at this internationally-renowned event.

Teachers confirmed for the event include Christal Carter, John Flynn, Marianne Fons, Jane Hill, Roberta Horton, Melody Johnson, Nancy Johnson-Srebro, Faye Labanaris, Libby Lehman, Mary Mashuta, Katie Pasquini Masopust, Judith Montano, Liz Porter, Mary Stori and more.

Feedsack Frenzy, the theme exhibit curated by Rita B. Barber will feature quilts and other items to help learn about the presence of

the decorative feedsack/textile and its use.

The evergrowing Quilters' Heritage Celebration juried and judged show will award over \$12,000 in prize money donated by local and national sponsors including: Itchin' to Stitch (WI), quilt shop/traveling vendor; The Old Country Store (PA), quilt shop; Quilting Today Magazine by Chitra Publishing Inc. (PA); Fairfield Processing Corporation (CT), Fiberfil products for quilters; Benartex Inc. (NY), textiles; Bernina of America, represented locally by Hinkletown Sewing Machine Shop, Ephrata, Mountain Mist (Stearns Technical Textile, OH), patterns and batt products for the quilter; EZ Quilting by Wright's (MA), publishers and producers of notions for quilters; Annapolis Quilt Guild (MD); Cherrywood Fabrics, Inc., producers of hand-dyed fabrics; Flynn Quilt Frame Company (MT), quilt frames/books; The People's Place Quilt Museum (PA).


Some things old and several things new, the third exhibit hall

will feature section C of Quilt National '97. Other exhibits will include the 1997/98 Hoffman Challenge; the 1997/98 Pilgrim Roy Challenge featuring fabrics from their line produced by P & B Textiles; the Silver Dollar City Challenge; Miniatures from the Heart, winners of the sixth Miniature Quilt Magazine (from Chitra Publications, Inc.) miniature contest and the Quilting Today Challenge; Five from Maine - The Expression of Five; Frigid Piecing; Collective Fusions; Rock and Roll Icons; Presenter's Showcase, from those teaching at QHC; and Producer's Showcase from many of those involved in the production of QHC.

The Fairfield Processing Corporation's Fashion Show will again be presented at a luncheon.

Show hours: Thursday, 9-5; Friday, 9-7; Saturday, 9-5; Sunday 11-4. For information on classes and other functions, contact: Rita B. Barber, at the Holiday Inn Lancaster Host Resort (717) 299-5500.

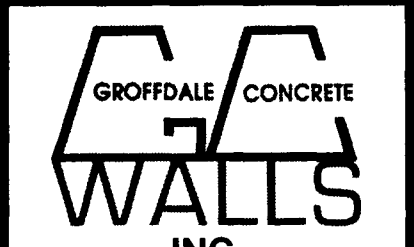
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