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Corona shop sells Savannah cats with recent wild heritage

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By **NITA HILTNER**
Special to The Press-Enterprise

Cat lovers can take a walk on the wild side in Corona.

Lee and Kimberly Draper, of Rancho Cucamonga, have opened the Savannah Cat Shoppe at the Dos Lagos shopping center in Corona, a pet store specializing in second- to fifth-generation Savannah cats. They are a crossbreed of the African Serval and domesticated cats such as the Egyptian Mau and Bengal cat.

The couple are registered as Savannah breeders, and they are owners of Bella Gattini, meaning "beautiful kittens," a registered cattery in Oklahoma.

Kimberly Draper, a CPA, said about 6,000 people have already walked through the store to see the five Savannah kittens since its Sept. 4 opening.

Savannahs are not tiny cats. Monday, officials at the Guinness Book of World Records informed the Drapers that one of their Savannahs at home, Scarlett's Magic, has been certified as the world's tallest domesticated cat at 17.1 inches shoulder to toe.

"We are absolutely thrilled," Kimberly Draper said.

Story continues below



Kathrin Stucki / Special to The Press-Enterprise
Savannah cat Scarlett's Magic, named the world's tallest domestic cat, can be seen at the Savannah Cat Shoppe at Dos Lagos in Corona.

The big cat can be seen at the shop, but it is not for sale.

The Drapers' decision to open a store happened in their home's driveway a couple of years after she gave a Savannah cat to her husband for his birthday.

"We were in our driveway sharing a glass of our favorite wine when I looked at Lee and said, 'I have something to tell you: the Savannah Cat Shoppe.' " she said. "He kiddingly said, 'No way!' And that is how it started," she said.

The couple were already breeding offspring of the Servals in Rancho Cucamonga and breeding Servals with domestic cats at the Bella Gattini cattery in Oklahoma, because California and many other states do not allow Servals.

Lee Draper, a business consultant, fell in love with his birthday present, Athena, for her many dog-like qualities, including a love for walking on a leash.

"I wasn't a cat lover, didn't grow up with cats and am allergic to cats," he said. "But I always told Kimberly that if I got a cat, I wanted a big one."

Lee Draper said Savannahs are smart, play hide and seek and follow him around like a dog. Athena will step right into the halter to go for a walk, and he said even the 13-week-old cubs will accept a leash.

He is not allergic to the Savannahs, and he said many people allergic to cats have not reacted to the ones in his shop.

The active, spotted cats come in several colors, including silver, brown, gold, black and black smoke

with tall ears and long legs. The back of the ears have a banding design that resemble eyes.

A first generation Savannahs can cost \$25,000 with second- to fifth-generations costing \$3,000 and up. In New York state, first- and second-generation Savannahs cannot be owned because of their wilder traits. Savannahs may be legally kept in California, according to the state department of Fish and Game.

The first Savannah was born in 1986 after a Bengal breeder crossbred a Serval and a domestic cat.

The breed was recognized in 2000, and the Savannah International Member & Breeder Association was formed. By May 2009, the number of registered Savannahs was 3,366. Kimberly Draper said there are about 200 Savannah breeders worldwide.

The couple built an 8-foot tall glass enclosure for the cats in the store.

Kimberly Draper said customers are invited into the enclosure to interact with the kittens after an interview and screening. The Drapers take the cats home at night to play with the couple's labradoodle and sleep with sons Marty, 10, and Matteo, 7.

Reach Nita Hiltner at nhiltner1@sbcglobal.net

Savannah Cat Shoppe

Address: 2795 Cabot Drive, Suite 180, Corona.

Information: 800-881-0006 or www.savannahcatshoppe.com.
