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Cougar farm brings new life to endangered animals

Rehabilitator aims for education, preservation of beloved wildcats

By Meg Dedolph
Emerald Contributor

Nutawni is a Native American word that means "pretty little girl." Only a year old, Nutawni, or Tawni, has wide soft eyes and pale brown fur.

She's not only pretty, she's playful too, especially when she leaps from a corner of her cage onto Ray Sebring's shoulders.

Tawni — 75 pounds of indigenous, endangered cougar — is one of three cougars in residence at Cascadia Rehabilitation, which Sebring owns and operates. About a half-hour north of Eugene, Cascadia Rehabilitation takes care of animals, especially cougars, that might be killed otherwise.

According to Sebring, the cougars in his care cannot be released into the wild because they have become accustomed to humans. If released, they would seek out people, and when hungry, would probably eat domestic animals.

Sebring's cougars are eventually sent to zoos and wildlife centers around the world, including New York and Australia, where they are used in educational programs.

Tawni is used in presentations in Eugene School District 4J, and she has a special relationship with Sebring, who raised her from a kitten. She sleeps in Sebring's bed at night, and if he forgets to let her in the house, she sits in her cage and squeaks until hoarse.

"But she's still a wild animal," Sebring said, "and you have to re-

spect that."

Many of his cougars, Sebring said, come from people who had tried to keep them as pets.

"It's unreasonably easy to breed and obtain cougars," he said. "There's too many unethical breeders who say, 'You can put 'em in your backyard on a chain, they're great with children, and you can feed them chicken necks.'"

Zoezy is an active 2-year-old who belonged to a woman for two years until the woman became pregnant and decided to get rid of her cougar, Sebring said. Instead of putting the animal to sleep, she gave Zoezy, who had spent much of her life in a garage, to Sebring.

Melena, another cougar in Sebring's care, was in the movie "Benji the Hunted," with two other cougars. After the filming, she was kept in a small cage and poorly fed, as were the other cats, he said. The other two cougars were sold as pets and eventually were put to sleep, while Melena ended up with Sebring.

According to Sebring, about 80 percent of the people who try to keep cougars as pets are mauled or injured by their cat. In these cases, the cougar usually is put to sleep.

"Cougars aren't vicious," Sebring said, "but you can't play with them. We're made out of papier-mache, and they're made of cast iron."

Sebring added that a cougar's muscles are five to six times stronger than a human's, so that "at 75 pounds, Tawni could punch



Ray Sebring, owner and operator of Cascadia Rehabilitation, looks after Tawni, a two-year-old female abandoned in the wild. The center takes in cats which have been abused as pets, or abandoned in the wild. Tawni is one of threecats currently in residence at Sebring's Santa Clara home.

like Mike Tyson."

Most cougars in captivity are declawed, which many people find cruel. Sebring disagrees, and said that because the cougar has no need for claws in captivity, removing them enables people to give the animals the affection that they need.

"It was difficult to declaw Tawni, until a group of my cougar-loving friends said, 'Ray, we like

you, and we'd like to see you live, so if you don't get Tawni declawed, we will.'"

Sebring works with a number of indigenous animals, but his love is the cougar. He worked with them for three years at Cougar Country, another local rehabilitation facility, before he bought his own cougar farm a little over a year ago.

"Cats just touched my heart," Sebring said. "You can only hear

so many stories about cats suffering, left in backs of cars, before you do something I still feel bad because I have to keep them in such small cages."

Sebring's facility consists of three chain-link cages, which don't give the cats any room to run, he said. To solve this, he is building a 19-foot-tall, 12,000-square-foot cage that will hold eight cougars.

"Once they're in here, the cats

can look up and see they sky instead of having wire mesh over their heads all the time," Sebring said. "They'll have room to run, too, so when I come in here, Tawni can jump on my back at 35 miles an hour."

"When this cage is done, I'll be able to sit up there with a cup of coffee in the mornings," Sebring

Turn to COUGARS, Page 18

EST. 1977

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GET INVOLVED IN THE CATHOLIC NEWMAN COMMUNITY

NOTE: Students' activities, classes and workshops are planned throughout the year. Check Newman Center's Sunday Bulletin and the Et al (EMERALD) for what's happening at the Center or call 343-7021.

MASS SCHEDULE:
Saturday: 5:00 p.m.
Sunday: 9:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m. & 7:30 p.m.
Monday — Friday: 5:10 p.m. Evening Prayer followed by Mass

EVERY WEDNESDAY: STUDENT MASS AT 9:00 P.M.
Sacrament of Reconciliation: Monday, Wednesday & Friday — 4:30 to 5:00 p.m.
Saturday at 4:30 p.m. or by appointment.

Office Hours: Monday thru Friday: 9:30 - Noon & 1:00 - 4:30 p.m.

STAFF:
Fr. Albert Felice-Pace, O.P., Pastor
Fr. Jose Pimentel, O.P.
Sr. Janet Ryan, SNJM
Gene Obersinner & Chris Fery, Peer Ministers
Nancy Nelson, Secretary
Gene Obersinner, Chelsea House Mgr.

SPECIAL HAPPENINGS:
MEN'S SUPPORT GROUP will meet every Thursday at 7:00 p.m. starting Thursday, September 19.
An **Inquiry Class** for those curious about the Catholic Church will be held every Tuesday starting Tuesday, September 24 at 7:30 p.m.
A **STUDENT MASS** is celebrated every Wednesday at 9:00 p.m. starting Wednesday, September 25. A social gathering will follow.
WELCOMING DINNER - at Chelsea House on Friday, September 27 at 7:00 p.m. Come to meet new people and renew your friendships.
A **BIBLE STUDY** is held on Mondays, starting Monday, September 30 at 7:30 p.m.
The **Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults** for those who are seriously interested to become a Catholic Christian is held every Sunday at 6:15 p.m. starting Sunday, September 29.
A **Social Issues Forum** will be held on the third Wednesday of October and November at 7:00 p.m. First forum will be on Wed., October 16.
Get-away weekend — **PARABLE WEEKEND RETREAT** will be on October 18-20 at St. Benedict's Lodge, McKenzie Bridge. Sign up now. Open to all students.
Mark your calendars — **MARK ALAN SPECIAL** — on Tuesday, October 22 at 7:30 p.m. Bring your friends and your books.

For more information call the Center at 343-7021

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