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Losing a purr-fect refuge

Cat sanctuary The Ninth Life will likely close this month because of reduced donations

Jacquelyn Lewis
Pulse Editor

Leanne and Lorna Cook's Pleasant Hill house is bursting at the seams, but in a few weeks, it might be completely empty.

A huge, shaggy dog guards the front door. Inside the cluttered living room, countless pairs of glowing eyes peer from beneath blankets, under boxes and inside cages. Two wiry-haired kittens skitter across the kitchen floor.

The Cook sisters started their cat sanctuary, The Ninth Life, in 1992. The day they opened their doors, stray and abandoned cats began flooding in — and so did donations. Cat Fancy magazine, as well as several local newspapers, featured the sanctuary in its pages, attracting individual and business donors from all over the country.

Leanne Cook said the organization has since found homes for 500 cats, most of these near death or extremely "feral" (afraid of humans) upon their arrival at the shelter. They have also spayed and neutered more than twice that many felines, with the help of organizations such as the Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon (FCCO). In fact, the sisters helped start the FCCO's Eugene mobile spay and neuter clinic five years ago.

These days, the Cooks said, the stream of incoming felines remains steady. However, the money has slowed to a trickle — so sluggish, in fact, the shelter might be forced to close for good.

"Before Sept. 11, we were getting about \$1,200 a month in donations," Leanne Cook said, stroking a wide-eyed orange cat. "We went from \$1,200 a month to \$200 a month."

Both sisters have physical disabilities that prevent them from working. Lorna Cook is legally blind, while Leanne Cook injured her

back in a car accident in 1997. She later re-injured it after a fall in The Ninth Life's rescue room. Leanne and Lorna Cook said their financial situation has become so dire they recently received an eviction notice.

The Cooks say they are not alone in their struggles. Many organizations have experienced reduced funding post-Sept. 11, because donors began pouring their resources into charities closer to New York.

"Sept. 11 killed almost every nonprofit organization," Leanne Cook said. "You get to a point where you have to say, 'Stop. There's people and animals starving because all the money is going to New York.' You have to keep the community going, too."

Eugene resident and Stray Cat Alliance founder Deanna Kuhn said her organization has also experienced budgetary problems this year.

"We've been okay, although we've been strapped," she said. "Sept. 11 has hurt because people lose jobs — they don't want to give donations and they can't afford to take care of their own pets."

Kuhn, a former FCCO coordinator, said Eugene will likely feel the absence of The Ninth Life deeply.

"I really think it's a loss to the community that they're not going to be able to continue," she said. "They've been a real life-saver. We really believe in their mission."

But Leanne Cook said The Ninth Life's mission has been fulfilled in many ways.

"We already made a huge difference," she said, noting that leukemia rates and unwanted litters have decreased throughout the community since the sanctuary opened.

A tour of the grounds reveals some of the fruits of this effort. Healthy and recuperating cats fill every single room — 88 felines in all. Cats peek out the windows of vehicles parked on the acre of lawn. They weave around Leanne Cook's feet as she traverses the terrain with her cane; they sniff hands in the driveway, swish tails in the hall. Lorna



Mark McCambridge Emerald

Leanne Cook cuddles with three of the 88 cats that share her home.

and Leanne Cook know each feline by name; they can tell a harrowing survivor story for each cat. The sisters, along with Leanne Cook's caregiver, Jeannette Sleeper, do a head count each night to make sure all the cats are safe.

"These are our children," Lorna Cook said.

Many of these "children" will have to find new homes when the sanctuary's impending closure comes to fruition.

The Cooks plan to hold an "adopt-a-thon," where they will work for two days to place 50 cats with permanent owners.

And what if all 50 cats aren't adopted?

Some will go to Greenhill Humane Society, and the rest will return home with the Cook sisters — wherever "home" might be.

"We'll just keep struggling," Lorna Cook said.

In addition to the "adopt-a-thon," Leanne Cook said Petco is helping The Ninth Life

with cat food donations.

Petco is also sponsoring the sanctuary through their "Tree of Hope," a program where customers can purchase Christmas trees for \$2 to \$10. Proceeds will be donated to local charities, including The Ninth Life.

Leanne Cook said she will miss many aspects of the sanctuary.

"Our very favorite part is when the phone rings and people call to say, 'This is the best cat I've ever had,'" she said, with tears in her eyes. "We take throwaways and turn them into house cats. That's why we do this — for that one, stupid phone call."

The Ninth Life is still seeking volunteers, and its "adopt-a-thon" will take place Dec. 14 and 15 at The Cat's Corner & More, located at 29th Avenue and Willamette Street, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

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'Guide' is conversation about sex

Book review

Mason West
Movies/Music/TV Columnist

When someone gets a book as a present, the general response is: "Oh ... a book. How nice." But if that book happens to be the "Guide To Getting It On," the receiver will be bouncing off the walls.

The following assumptions must be made before continuing: Wanting to know more about sexuality will not land you in hell. People like being physically intimate. Intimacy does not just mean intercourse. Nobody knows everything there is to know about sexuality. Still with me? Good.

While "The Guide" could be written off as a gag gift, much like a penis enlarger or cucumber vibrator (both of which I have seen surprise unsuspecting friends on birthdays), it's no joke. The 700-page book presents an honest, straightforward and extensive discussion about physical intimacy and all the baggage that comes with it.

Its length may be more intimidating than the subject matter, but "The Guide" is divided into thematic chap-

ters, such as "Balls, Balls, Balls" and "Sex During Pregnancy," to be used as needed. However, some of the more cryptic titles such as "Techno Breasts and Weenie Angst" require a quick skim to decode.

The book's main point is that it's natural for people to be apprehensive about their sexuality, and coming to terms with it requires a lot of trust and faith. Finding out what makes every person tick (and writhe, and moan) can only be done with a little show and tell ... or just go through the book with a highlighter and discreetly slide it someone's way.

Though other self-help guides may preach the same practice, "The Guide" is different because it is an open conversation with its readers. Author Paul Joannides comes across as a friend rather than a professional by avoiding a stern, authoritative tone. He regularly admits his own uncertainties or shortcomings, reinforcing the need for sexual exploration.

In addition to his own honesty, Joannides includes letters and confessions from readers (the book is in its third edition) adding breadth and perspective. These extra voices also help with the fe-



male side of things. And for the hard to please, "The Guide" recommends other books and videos for further interest.

It's stunning just how much Joannides takes on. As mentioned before, one of the chapters deals with sex during pregnancy. There are also chapters discussing sex when disabled, homosexual relationships and various kinky explorations.

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Copperfield brings weak performance, tricks to Eugene

Pulse review

Peter Hallinan
Fine Arts Columnist

He has escaped from Alcatraz, walked through the Great Wall of China and made the Statue of Liberty disappear. And Wednesday night, David Copperfield brought his world-class illusions to a packed audience at the Hult Center.

Copperfield walked through a solid sheet of steel, shrank to a foot in length and made 13 randomly selected people disappear. He performed the traditional "pick a card, any card" routine, but with a twist — a deadly scorpion found the chosen card. With audience members on stage, Copperfield magically produced a vintage 1950s convertible.

His magic was stunning, but his performance was half-hearted. Copperfield rushed his lines, mumbled, cracked weak jokes and tried to be hip when he is obviously not. The magician still had that charismatic grin, but there was no soul behind it; he looked like a man who has spent too much time jumping in and out of shiny boxes.

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