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Lions, Tigers and Bears

By **Greg Eichelberger** - 06/12/2012

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“We are one of only 12 big cat sanctuaries in the United States,” Said Brink, who was born and raised in Alpine, but discovered her love for rare animals while staying in Texas. “This rescue and educational facility allows the wildlife in our care the opportunity to live out their lives with dignity in a safe environment. Our goal is to provide a safe haven to rescued exotic animals and to educate the public about the growing population of abandoned and unwanted exotic animals and where they come from.

““After witnessing the heart-breaking phenomenon known as the exotic animal trade and seeing the victims of this business, I was compelled to do what I could to help these animals”” she added. “I have spent a lot of sleepless nights picturing the tortured lives these cats end up living.

“The disgusting places where these marvelous animals are kept – sometimes in places you would least expect, in miserable holding cells with no sunlight or

windows, living in cages so small they barely have room to stand up or turn around.”

The problem isn't always purposeful abuse of these animals, though. It seems that many individuals purchase them as pets, not knowing just how much maintenance (and cost) is involved in raising such a beast. They then either neglect or abuse (intentionally or not) and often-times end up abandoning it in a harmful situation.

This is where Lions, Tigers and Bears comes in, taking them in and caring for them for the rest of their lives.

From the entity's website: "In many areas of the United States, there are countless unwanted, abused, and abandoned big cats in captivity.

"In fact, the number of animals bred and born in captivity is greater than that in the wild. In most cases, cats born in captivity must endure horrific neglect and abuse due to the immense responsibility in their upkeep.

"In many states, big cats, most commonly lions, tigers, cougars and bobcats, are acquired by roadside zoos and then eventually become surplus animals, are retired from entertainment, are purchased as pets when young, or are sold and bred for profit."

Brink herself has traveled all over the globe to bring some measure of comfort to these unfortunate creatures, even recently testifying in Ohio to curb that state's laws allowing the purchase of such animals.

It is no small proposition, however. "The costs are high," Brink said. "It's about \$10,000 a year for just the basic needs of one of our animals; about \$30,000 a month to run this facility (which houses 17 different species and over 130

animals). And, since we are a non-profit, we rely heavily upon private donations and paid memberships.”

Fortunately, the effort has many patrons, but like any other charitable organization, can always use more support. A small but luxurious suite (White Oak Wild Nights) starting at \$500 a night and is available for rental, offering those who stay a quiet experience in a rural area and a private tour of the facility.

Call (619) 445-0997 for more details.

Another fund-raising effort, the main one of the year, according to Brink, takes place on Saturday, May 12 at 1 p.m. (VIPs, \$160) and 2 p.m. (regular admission, adult \$95 and children \$25).

The event will include live and silent auctions, Phil’s BBQ, Astro-Jumps and games for the children and live entertainment from the Disney Dancers (from the “Step Up” films).

There is also a chance to view these beautiful animals up close and personal.

For more information call (619) 659-8078 or visit www.lionstigersandbears.org.