
HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR BAKES AND SELLS COOKIES, TO BENEFIT BIG CAT RESCUE

By Jenny O'Donnell



LOCAL VOLUNTEERS BAKE COOKIES TO SELL. COINS FOR CATS RAISES MONEY FOR BIG CAT RESCUE, A SANCTUARY LOCATED IN TAMPA WHICH HOUSES ABANDONED EXOTIC AND ENDANGERED CATS.

Newsome High School senior Christina Hendryx is simply one of many high-achieving students in the community—she has attained a noteworthy grade point average, volunteered with various organizations, and participated in a variety of extracurricular activities. What makes her different, however, is her passion for animals in need. She founded Coins for Cats, a charity that supports the Big Cat Rescue of Tampa, when she was only in the eighth grade. What began as a young girl's dream has blossomed into a certified charity as well as a benefactor for the sanctuary.

"Coins for Cats started in 2008 on the bus ride home from school. A few friends and I were talking and discovered that we shared a passion for animals and an interest in Big Cat Rescue," said Hendryx, 17 years old. "Even though we couldn't volunteer there [because of our age], we still wanted to help out in what-

ever way we could."

Coins for Cats is a small but devoted organization, consisting of six volunteers who bake homemade cookies during the weekends to sell for the charity. These teens meet over the summer to decide their "cookie months," and have spent more than 20 hours a week baking hundreds of goodies. The money earned supports the widespread efforts of Big Cat Rescue, including providing food, medical care and maintenance of enclosures for the wild cats. "Big Cat Rescue takes in exotic cats from all over the world for rehabilitation and offers a safe, comfortable retirement for former circus animals and pets," said Hendryx.

Big Cat rescue is the world's largest center for recovering exotic and endangered cats and is accredited by the Global Federation of Sanctuaries. The rescue sits on 55 acres of land and contains more than 100 cats representing 14 species, which means it relies heavily on donations from sponsors such as Coins for Cats. "We are delighted to have the privilege of knowing these young people," said Beth Kamhi, the education director for the rescue. "These kids are helping fund the care of our cats, and raising awareness of the bigger issues of wild cats in captivity among their peers."

To become involved with or donate to Coins for Cats, visit the website coinsforcats.webs.com, which contains a volunteer form, or call 951-7355. To plan a tour of Big Cat Rescue, visit www.bigcatrescue.org.