

Amazing Animals

Savannah cats such as Kweli are a cross between a domestic cat and an African wild cat called a serval.



ANIMALS TO THE RESCUE



KWELI VISITS A WHEELCHAIR-BOUND BOY AT A SCHOOL.

THESE CUTE-AND-CUDDLIES GIVE COMFORT AND CARE TO PATIENTS.

Sonoma, California

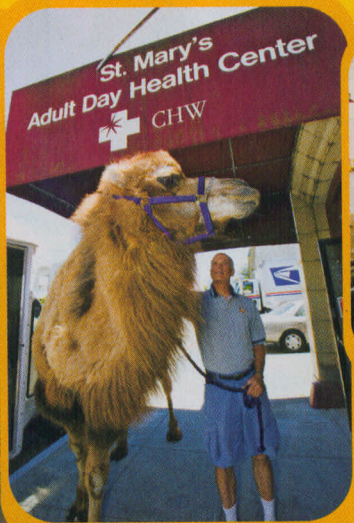
Kweli the savannah cat seemed to know that a sick boy needed cheering up. After weeks in a hospital bed, the 9-year-old was waiting for yet another exam when exotic-looking Kweli brushed up against his arm, purring. Suddenly the boy grinned as if forgetting he was sick. "Is he a tiger?" he asked. "Nope," said Kweli's trainer, Robin Lyon. "He's an animal therapist."

Therapy animals visit nursing homes and hospitals. They're trained to make patients happy. "After exams and other procedures, a soft, friendly animal makes anyone feel better," Lyon says. She works with about 70 therapy animals at her ranch, including the inspiring animals on these pages.

I'M
GLAD THEY
BROUGHT THE
FANCY LIMO
TODAY!



KAZY ENJOYS THE VIEW ON THE WAY TO A CENTER FOR SENIOR CITIZENS.



TRAVELING CAMEL

To train the therapists—almost all of which were rescued from neglectful owners—Lyon first gets them used to the other animals at the ranch. Then she exposes them to different situations so they're comfortable around people. After a vet deems the animals healthy, the therapists start their feel-good missions.

But it's not just a job for the animals. Kazy the camel likes people so much that she'll squeeze into elevators to get to patients. "Once she saw a woman sitting in a wheelchair and immediately knelt down and laid her head on the surprised woman's lap, waiting to be petted," Lyon says.

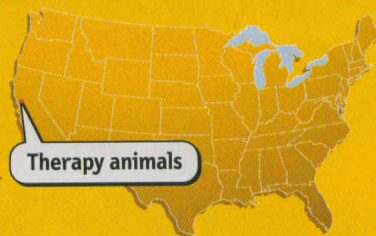
SINGING HORSE

Often the animals seem to know that laughter really is the best medicine. Lyon

remembers bringing Muppet the miniature horse to a nursing home during a holiday choir concert. "Every time the singers shook their bells, Muppet would whinny and toss his head," she says. "No one could stop laughing, including the choir!"



MUPPET STRIKES A POSE.



Therapy animals



KING ARTHUR GIVES A WOMAN A SMOOCH.

TALKING BIRD

Some animals help patients exercise their arms and legs by playing with the patients. King Arthur the parrot prefers talk therapy. "There was a boy too weak to pet the animals," Lyon says. "So I gently lifted his arm, and King Arthur stepped on. The bird said, 'Hi! Whatcha doin'?' And the boy just laughed and laughed."