

Free For All The Purrfect Cat

By Jill McWhinnie

The Toronto Star recently reported that through genetic alterations and selective breeding a California company, Allerca, has developed the first hypoallergenic cat. Allerca kittens, which lack the protein in cat saliva and skin which triggers sneezing and eye-watering in humans, will retail for \$4,000 US and should be available this spring.

With the allergy problem licked, researchers can now focus on even more promising feline modifications, for example:

Removal of the hairball gene: \$2,000. No longer will cat owners be awakened at 2 a.m. by the familiar "ulka...ulka...ulka...ulka..." and have to tiptoe over darkened floors to avoid stepping in the result of their failure to give Fluffy her daily brushing.

Removal of the furniture scratching gene: \$1,000. An attractive option for cat owners opposed to de-clawing, whose sofas, rugs and draperies have been shredded by their resident felines. This modification includes a special offer: don't pay a cent for the cat until furniture has been left unclawed for three months.

Removal of the finicky eater gene: \$2,000. Imagine owning a cat that eats whatever is put down for it - economy cat food, bulk dry food, table scraps. No more holding out for gourmet cat foods, sockeye salmon, fillet mignon. This genetic modification pays for itself in less than two months.

Removal of the howling tomcat gene: \$1,000. This breakthrough mutes male cat fights by eliminating the gene that produces the annoying ggggrrrrrr...RrrrOW challenge emitted by male cats prior to joining battle. The selectively bred, toned-down tomcat would deliver its invitation to battle exclusively by silent snarls and rude tail gestures.

Removal of the independence gene: \$5,000. The ultimate feline genetic modification; a cat that does what you say, comes when called, sits, stays, and fetches. Scientists responsible for this breakthrough are expected to win the Nobel Prize for science.

So for a mere \$15,000 cat fanciers can soon look forward to owning non-allergic, non-scratching, eat-anything, loyal, obedient pets. Or, for the price of a bail-out at the animal shelter they could obtain the same creature today. It's called a dog.

LIFE IN THE STRAWBERRY PATCH Helping out is fun to do

By Laura Roessler

A few years ago I was immersed in my wonderful job at the library, helping people find a special book, assisting them with information; and best of all, making them laugh.

One evening I was greeted with, "Hi Laura, I have something in mind that I think you would really enjoy." It was Sue Sherban, then the mayor, looking for Strawberry Festival volunteers. Since I was busy with work and courses, I explained that I couldn't take on anything more. I had dodged the volunteering bullet.

The following year Sue, the queen of commitment, was back. "Are you up for a challenge?" I nodded numbly. Seeing my expression, she smiled and said, "Just come to a meeting and see what you think."

I sat in that meeting and listened as ideas flew around the table. There was much laughter and rolling of eyes. This incredible group of people basked in their successes, discussed what went amiss, and were determined to make the Strawberry Festival even better next year. And that's exactly what they did.

At first I felt overwhelmed. It was a crazy, challenging learning curve, but it was infectious. Since that evening, I have been thinking, planning, cajoling, pleading for funding, negotiating for a better deal, praying to the gods of weather, and constantly checking emails.

My busy life has taken on new meaning. I have become proficient at telephone tag, paper folding, supply gathering, hunting down fellow committee members and living on an adrenaline high.

This year is the 23rd anniversary of the Strawberry Festival. What began as a small community fair has evolved into a four day weekend when downtown Stouffville becomes the centre of activity for 30,000 people. And as a result of my proficiency at folding paper and T shirts I have been asked to chair this year's festival, a job which I simply couldn't begin to do effectively without an amazing team of talented and committed volunteers.

The 2007 festival introduces a new Friday "Giggles" evening featuring three comedians who have appeared at The Halifax Comedy Festival, Comedy Now, Club 54 and Yuk Yuk's. Irwin Barker is preparing for another televised Comedy Festival, sharing the stage with Mary Walsh and Sean Majumder. Debi DiGiovanni is a contestant in "Last Comic Standing" and Jim McNally's self deprecating Irish humour is infectious.

The Good Brothers will perform on Saturday night and the perennial favourite Black Board Blues Band returns on Sunday to celebrate Canada Day. Many traditional attractions will be back and Main St. will be jam-packed with crafters and vendors on Saturday. The weekend ends with an incredible fireworks display.

This year's festival will offer great food and music; rides and games, a three day Kidz Zone, talented local entertainers, rock wall climbing, hot air balloon rides and much more. We need volunteers who like to laugh, are proficient at eye rolling, and want to become involved in our community; planners, thinkers, full or part time participants and T-shirt folders required.

Did I mention I have something in mind that I think you would really enjoy? For more information, visit strawberrymfestival@rogers.com or call Laura at 905-640-2283 or Sue at 905-640-4584.



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