

Frances the talking cat

At least one cat at the International Cat Show could talk.

Three-year-old Frances Batzler, of Portland, wandered through the rows of kennels, holding her mother's hand while clutching an orange plush kitten in the other arm.

Frances wore a black cat costume, complete with pointy ears and a jingly catnip toy.

"We got (the costume) for Halloween, and she's been wearing it ever since," said her mother, Cassidy Batzler. "There's lots of meowing at home. She thinks she's a black Cheshire."

Cassidy Batzler said she's not sure what sparked Frances' infatuation -- her mother is more of a dog person, and the family doesn't own a cat. But ever since Halloween, the little girl calls her parents "Momma and Dadda Kitty." Her little sister, to Frances, is "Baby Kitty."

Cassidy Batzler said the family plans to adopt an adult cat from an area shelter. They're looking for something that's already good with children and trained to use the litter box, she said.

As the Frances and her mother prepared to leave the show, Frances waved at a Bengal, bidding it a feline farewell.

"Bye, meow!" she said.

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Judy Sugden, of Los Angeles, holds a male toyger Sunday at a cat show sponsored by The International Cat Association in Northeast Portland. Toygers have been bred to favor features resembling a tiger.

The business of breeding

Judy Sugden comes from a family of note in the world of cat breeders.

Sugden's mother created the popular Bengal breed in the early 1980s, she said. Now, Judy hopes to follow her mother's legacy by developing the world's smallest tiger. And she's getting pretty close.

"Obviously, she's the grande dame of Bengals, so I'm not doing that," she said.

Sugden, a Los Angeles-based breeder, has spent two decades perfecting her "toyger" breed. The toyger, which is recognized as a registered breed, closely resembles the large jungle cats with its smaller-than-average hooded eyes and braided black stripes over a burnt brown coat.

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But Sugden said she's not done yet. She wants to achieve the wider-nosed look, the fluffy fur around the face and the assertive gait of wild tigers.

Even in a half-finished state, the toyger's resemblance to wild tigers is undeniable in Zylopace and Jungle Monkey, the two toygers Sugden brought to the International Cat Show on Sunday.

"It's a long, slow process," Sugden said. "Right now, we have a spectacular orange cat with black markings."

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