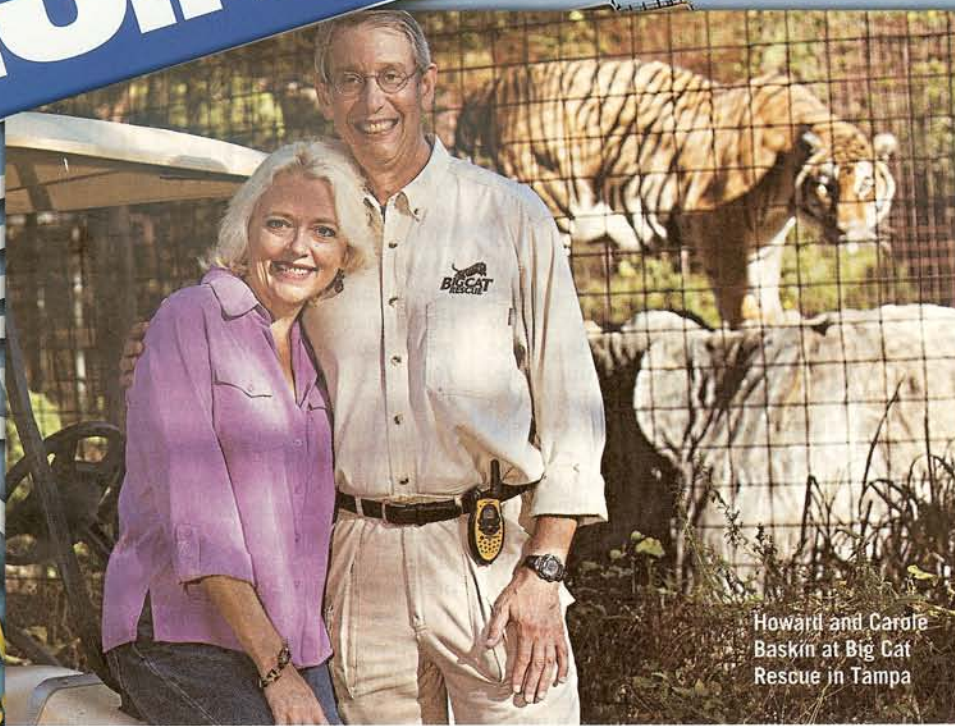




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Howard and Carole Baskin at Big Cat Rescue in Tampa

of the cats, but it was another love that inspired him. His wife, Carole, whom he met in 2002 and married in 2004, founded the 15-year-old sanctuary and is CEO.

"I kind of married into this transition, although it was of course my choice, not a requirement," Baskin says. "I fell in love with her. One thing that drew me to her was her passion for the mission and the excitement of working for a cause, not just living."

Take Nikita, for example. The 6-year-old lioness spent her first year living on a concrete slab, chained to a wall by a drug dealer in Nashville. She was discovered in a raid and arrived at Big Cat five years ago with sores on her elbows the size of tennis balls.

Purrfect fit. Not all of the cats were abused. Some were abandoned by owners who could no longer afford to care for them. Others were retired from circus acts, rescued from fur farms, or obtained from roadside zoos that

had fallen on hard times. Baskin came well prepared to bolster the sanctuary's shaky financial underpinnings. The small firms where he used to work ran the gamut from a bridge builder to a foundry to an audiovisual firm. They were businesses where finances were in disarray when he arrived. Someone had to figure out how to get things organized and create systematic controls.

Visitors who take educational tours of Big Cat have doubled since 2003, to 26,000 last year. Revenues from contributions rose 50 percent in 2006 alone. The annual Fur Ball, the chief fundraiser, brought in an estimated \$100,000 in October, up from \$17,000 five years ago. Carole has had time to advocate for laws to crack down on illegal animal dealers and implement humane care standards for the cats.

Although Baskin would like to spend a bit more time on the golf course, there's little other downside. His full-time consulting income, which often topped six figures, had already been trimmed, and he had a thrifty lifestyle, enough savings, and growing retirement funds.

"I don't take a traditional salary, but, in reality, I get a double payback. I not only get to do something for the cats," he says as he watches Nikita devour her afternoon "bloodsicle" snack. "I feel like I am contributing to the world. More importantly, I get to make Carole happy. That's my No. 1 goal." Spoken like a true newlywed. ●

SECOND ACTS

Where Work Really Is a Zoo

His love of a woman leads to a love of exotic animals

By Kerry Hannon

Howard Baskin admits that a few homeless cats have won his heart over the years, but saving abandoned and abused lions, lynxes, and leopards was by no means his dream, let alone his passion. When it came to giving to animal causes, he might write a modest check to the Humane Society of the United States. His world was finance and marketing.

Yet there's no denying that a stroll where he works at the 45-acre Big Cat Rescue, a non-profit educational sanctuary in Tampa, one of the largest in the world devoted to the big cats, leaves him inspired.

This is where Bengal tigers, African lions, snow leopards, bobcats, and other exotic cats recline gracefully on tree limbs, stretch languidly in their dens, or splash playfully in ponds amid shady oaks and palmettos. In all, there are 140 feline residents with permanent homes here. "Looking at these animals and realizing that I've been able to make a dif-

ference in the quality of their lives and securing their future is wonderful," he says.

Baskin, 57, isn't one of the cats' caregivers, but he uses his financial acumen to ensure they live a healthful life. With a Harvard M.B.A. and a law degree, he spent the first 11 years of his career at Citicorp, rising to become director of strategic planning for the commercial real-estate division in New York. "Work-

Baskin spent years at Citicorp, honing financial skills now used to help animals.

ing in a small business had always been my plan, but I kept getting interesting jobs at the bank," he recalls.

Finally, in 1991, he left Citi to work as a management consultant for a succession of

small companies. Eight years later, he opted for a less stressful pace, consulting part time and freeing up time for tennis and leisurely rounds of golf. But something was missing.

And in 2003, just a few years into his semiretired bachelor life, he did an about-face. Before he knew it, he had ramped up to 60-hour workweeks at the sanctuary and agreed to take charge of its finances free. Sure, Baskin is fond