

Buddies was founded in 1989 by Anthony Kennedy Shriver of Miami Beach while he was a student at Georgetown University.

•TURN TO EARMARKS, 21A

## EXOTIC WILDLIFE

# Playboy model is in trouble with big cats

■ Corinne Oltz, a former Kendall Hooters waitress and Playboy video star, has earned a reputation as a reckless handler of exotic cats.

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A former Hooters waitress who once appeared in a Playboy video, Corinne Oltz's ability to control wild animals has long been suspect.

The animal handler's leopard and cougar have lunged at children. Her serval cats have escaped, terrorizing neighbors. Once, a co-worker saw her mace a cat.

But after last month's mauling of a child by a cougar at a birthday party, the state has finally agreed to strip her of her license.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission on Friday banned Oltz, who runs Kendall's Wild Animal World, from exhibiting animals

•TURN TO CATS, 2A



NURI VALLBONA/2004 FILE

**IN HIALEAH:** A honey bear licks controversial handler Corinne Oltz.

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# Video star no hit with animals

\*CATS, FROM 1A

like cougars and serval cats, medium-sized felines often confused with cheetahs.

"The family has been working with the commission and is pleased that they have taken this measure," said Dan Dolan, the attorney for the 4-year-old mauled by a cougar named Georgia on Nov. 18.

"However, the community deserves to know why she had her license in the first place, given her track record."

The mauling has also renewed calls to limit the exhibition of exotic cats while casting scrutiny on so-called "edu-tainment" companies that showcase wildlife at schools, fairs and birthday parties.

Oltz did not return phone calls Friday from The Miami Herald.

Though one of her licenses has been revoked, she isn't out of business. Oltz's company, also known as Pangea Productions, can still showcase more benign animals like raccoons, snakes and lemurs.

In recent years, she has been a polarizing figure in the animal exhibition industry, authorities and observers say.

Pangea was co-founded in the early 1990s by Grant Kemmerer, who later brought in then-girlfriend Oltz to help finance and run the company.

At the time, she waitressed at a Kendall Hooters and dabbled in modeling. In 1997, she appeared as a policewoman in the Playboy video *Girls in Uniform*.

Her first brush with the law came in May 1998 when she sent a cougar named Shasta to a restaurant with an inexperienced trainer and it bit an 8-year-old boy, officials say.

At a Coral Gables birthday party in December 1998, Oltz was showing a cougar named Chase when he attacked and injured a 5-year-old girl. Chase was later euthanized and tested for rabies.

After Chase's attack, Miami-Dade Judge Beth Bloom ordered the handler to use barriers when exhibiting cougars.

By then, Kemmerer, one of the company's owners, said he was disgusted with Oltz's blatant disregard for safety and animal abuse — he cited a time she maced a caged cougar to instill fear in the animal.

"The animals are a way for her to get attention from people," said Kemmerer, who left the company after that.

Oltz's reputation in the ani-



MIAMI HERALD FILE, 1998

**SNAKE HANDLER:** Corinne Oltz of Pangea Productions shows a Burmese Python to schoolchildren at the Miami-Dade Public Library.

mal exhibit industry grew.

In October 1999, one of her serval cats escaped from a Miami townhome, terrorizing neighbors and landing on the local TV news. She was convicted of not properly caging the cat.

Two years later, Oltz was exhibiting a leopard on a leash for a company picnic in Broward County when it nearly killed a 7-year-old boy. To The Miami Herald, she identified the animal as a serval cat.

"It's so devastating because we try to be as positive as possible," she said then. "There's nothing I can do. It's so disheartening."

Broward Judge Leonard Feiner banned her from showing leopards, which fall under a wildlife class designated Class 1, which includes lions and tigers.

At the time, Fish and Wildlife Commission Capt. John West, then an investigator in Broward, recommended all her permits be revoked or allowed to expire.

But fish and wildlife officials in Tallahassee — then under different leadership — never heeded the request. Oltz kept her permit to exhibit Class II animals like cougars.

To obtain a Class II permit, a person needs to prove he owns the proper cages and has at least one year of training in handling, feeding and caring for the animals.

In the Broward mauling,

Metrozoo animal expert Ron Magill served as an expert witness in the criminal case, saying cougars should be kept in enclosures, not allowed on leashes or allowed to pose for photos with children.

"I find it amazing she still had a license," Magill said Friday.

However, the state usually offers exhibitors the chance to correct their mistakes.

Speaking generally, fish and wildlife spokesman Henry Cabbage said: "The permit holders do have some rights. We don't want to be too draconian about pulling their permits."

Later in October 2006, officials say, Oltz allowed an African serval cat to escape from a Halloween exhibit at the Palm Aire Resort in Pompano Beach. It eluded authorities — until this week when it was spotted and recaptured on the resort's golf course.

On Nov. 18, Oltz was hired to show animals at a birthday party for the child of Francisco Unanue, president of Goya Foods.

But when a 4-year-old sneaked up behind the cougar, the animal gashed the child's face and severed her ear. The girl, now 5, is recovering.

It's unclear whether Oltz allowed children to pet the cat. Witnesses have been uncooperative.

While a home video exists of the attack, Unanue's attorney will not give it to investigators.

One factor is clear. Oltz did not use a barrier as ordered by Judge Feiner, said Fish and Wildlife Commission Lt. Pat Reynolds.

In the past, the company had used chain-link panels strung to posts, arranged in a semi-circle.

"She just disregarded the judge's orders," Reynolds said.

Oltz faces a misdemeanor charge of endangering public safety, although it has not been filed yet.

Meanwhile, the mauling has again ignited debate over companies like Wild Animal World.

Carole Baskin, who heads Tampa-based Big Cat Rescue, said in an e-mail that such businesses deliver conflicting messages.

"While their lips say, 'These animals make bad pets,' their actions show wild animals being leashed, bottled-fed and fondled — and actions speak louder than words," said Baskin, who supports laws to limit exotic cat exhibitions.

Others, like Metrozoo's Magill, say the companies fill a valuable role in educating children, but exhibitors who skirt safety rules must be weeded out.

Kemmerer, Oltz's former business partner, who now runs Wild World of Animals in Pennsylvania, said of his former girlfriend: "Everyone who does this for a living is ashamed of her."