Going to the dogs - and cats - Correction Appended

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Correction Appended

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Body

Julia Roach is the catwoman of Pinellas County.

Roach raises Siamese cats and has 41 felines living under one roof - more than anyone else in the county. Nineteen of them are registered out of her home on 82nd Street in Seminole; the rest are younger than 4 months and don't need to be registered.

Then there's Margaret Grundman of St. Petersburg, who has more registered dogs in her home on 63rd Avenue S than anyone else in Pinellas. Grundman started raising basenjis - African hunting dogs - about 30 years ago. Now she has 12.

CATSMEOW

While Roach and Grundman represent the extremes in Pinellas, more residents are joining their ranks. Pinellas County Animal Control director Kenny Mitchell says the number of licensed animals in Pinellas County has never been higher.

Licensed dogs and cats jumped about 60 percent this year from 97,000 to 154,000. Dogs saw the most dramatic increase, rising from 62,563 to 97,904. Cats went from 33,527 to 56,255.

Mitchell attributes the hike to a rabies scare, lowering the registration fee from $ 15 to $ 5 last summer and a program that provided vaccinations for a dollar.

While the overwhelming majority of licensed animals are canines, Mitchell is convinced that cats far outnumber dogs.

"It's safe to say there are two or three times as many cats as dogs in Pinellas County," Mitchell said. "We're seeing it in terms of intakes of strays. It's two to one, cats to dogs."

Thomas Dent, president of the Cat Fanciers Association in Manasqua, N.J., said Pinellas County reflects a national trend. Americans have chosen cats as their pet of choice for the past 10 years.

The official records show south and north Pinellas are equally dog and cat crazy. There are about seven dogs and four cats for every 100 people.

The most common breed of pet, however, is not a mutt, but the shorthair cat, a catchall phrase that encompasses everything from an alley cat to the garden variety tabby.

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As for dogs, Pinellas County defies the national trend for the favorite pooch. Registered pedigrees on file with the American Kennel Club in New York City showed the Labrador retriever to be the most popular breed in the country last year.

Here, the Lhasa apso, a small long-haired dog from Tibet, is the pedigree of choice.

Mitchell said the high number of apartments and condominiums in the area are ideal for small dogs and cats.

They certainly fit into Roach's two-bedroom home, where all but four male Siamese cats get to roam freely in a room that resembles a child's nursery. Several large cages are filled with kittens, all of them inoculated and spayed.

"I will be sitting in the other room and I can hear them start to tease the males and I will know exactly who it is by the sound of their cry," Roach said.

Mitchell said Roach is a licensed breeder with a business license and therefore is allowed to maintain a large number of cats under one roof.

"We're not going to shut them down as long as they keep the place clean and care for the animals," Mitchell said. Each city regulates the number of cats and dogs an average resident may keep. In St. Petersburg, for example, it's five dogs and 10 cats unless you are a breeder.

Roach may have the most Siamese cats in the county, but she is not alone when it comes to owning a brood of pets.

Grundman's 12 basenjis look like a cross between a boxer and a pharaoh hound.

She said she decided to raise dogs because there was an overabundance of cats, a problem that continues to plague her neighborhood.

"There are just too many roaming loose," Grundman said. "They're supposed to be confined and licensed just like a dog. I am amazed how many are roaming the area."

She said her dogs leave the house only when they compete in various shows across the United States and Canada, noting that she bought a 36-foot mobile home to help transport her dogs to each event.

Roach is equally as competitive.

The 40 ribbons on her living room wall are a testimony to her cats' performance. Each kitten costs between $ 200 and $ 400, depending on the coloring and features. Roach refuses to sell a breeding cat to anyone in the South.

"Why do I want to compete against myself?" said Roach, who accounts for a third of all Siamese cats registered in the Seminole ZIP code areas.

She said she spends roughly $ 500 per month in food and veterinary bills. That does not include the price of kitty litter (80 pounds a week), health certificates ($ 40 per cat) or toys.

Larry Roach jokingly refers to his job at the Pinellas County wastewater treatment plant as the Rockefeller Foundation, the money that supports the couple's feline passion.

Several years ago, the couple said their home started to feel a little cramped. At that time, Roach was breeding Persian and Siamese cats as well as miniature schnauzers.

"We had nearly 60 cats in the house," Julia Roach said. "That's when I felt overwhelmed."

Now that the number has dropped, she said she feels more in control of her own home. A quick glance around reveals who has the run of the place. Cat toys are piled high in a dog bed. Six miniature schnauzers are outside in a fenced yard.

The cats so outnumber the dogs that the schnauzers can only run and hide.

With such a menagerie of animals under one roof, the Roaches have discovered one key secret to a good nights sleep:

"Around 10 p.m., I'll go in and feed everybody a good portion of raw meat," Roach said. "Then 30 minutes later, they'll go to sleep and stay that way for five or six hours."

PINELLAS COUNTY

Top 5 breeds

Dogs	Cats
1. Lhasa apso	1. Shorthair
2. German shepherd	2. Longhair
3. Poodle	3. Siamese
4. Cocker spaniel	4. Persian
5. Rottweiler	5. Himalayan

Top 10 names

Dogs	Cats
1. Bear	1. Kitty
2. Lady	2. Tiger
3. Max	3. Smokey
4. Shadow	4. Tigger
5. Bandit	5. Shadow
6. Lucky	6. Baby

Correction

The Labrador retriever is the most popular breed of dog in Pinellas County. A story Sunday named a different breed.
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Graphic

COLOR PHOTO, BRIAN LUKANIC, (2); COLOR PHOTO, MAURICE RIVENBARK; BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO, BRIAN LUKANIC; BLACK AND WHITE CHART, (2); COLOR CHART, (2); Julia and Larry Roach with some of their Siamese cats. (SE, LA, CT, NT); The Roaches' Siamese jockey for Julia's attention. (NEIGHBORHOOD TIMES); Margaret Grundman and her basenjis, Elvie and Harold. (SE, LA, CT, NEIGHBORHOOD TIMES); The Roaches' Siamese jockey for Julia's attention. (SE, LA, CT, NT); Lists top 5 breeds of dogs and cats in Pinellas County and lists top 10 names (SE, LA, CT); Lists favorite breeds of cats and dogs broken down by zip code, with drawings of a cat and dog. (SE, LA, CT, NT); Top 5 breeds of dogs and cats in Pinellas and top 10 names (NT, NEIGHBORHOOD TIMES); Lists favorite breeds of cats and dogs broken down by zip code. (NEIGHBORHOOD TIMES)

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