



Brookdale Residents Help Furry-Faced

MADAGASCAR'S REFUGEE

Residents at Brookdale Forest City in North Carolina hosted a fundraiser to benefit a very different kind of assisted living community that cares for 250 Madagascar refugees with furry faces.

Those endangered residents are lemurs. Their “assisted living” community is the Duke University Lemur Center, an 80-acre forested wildlife preserve.



Lemurs Have Strange Funny Faces

Most people have no idea what lemurs look like. They live on Madagascar, a remote tropical island near the coast of east Africa.

There are 33 different lemur species, each bearing a slight resemblance to other more familiar animals. Lemurs can display the features of a monkey, a fox, cat, squirrel, or outer space alien.

At first sight, people often study lemurs simply to figure out what they are. Once you are drawn in by their odd faces, it's easy to imagine personalities behind those strange lovable eyes.

Brookdale Celebrates: Madagascar

This senior-and-lemur connection began with Brookdale Celebrates, a program that presents a variety of fun monthly themes for dining menus and parties that take residents on a tour of world cuisines and cultures.

When Brookdale Forest City introduced the Madagascar theme, it piqued residents' curiosity. Madagascar is a mystery. Most people know nothing about that obscure island.

Fortunately, the community's Resident Programs Coordinator, Tish Zimmerman, plans travelogue-themed activities that spotlight each Brookdale

Celebrates country. After Tish learned that Madagascar is the home of the rare lemur, she found a documentary on lemurs hosted by John Cleese for a community matinee.

Monty Python Looks for Lemurs

For Cleese, best known from the British comedy TV series “Monty Python's Flying Circus,” that documentary “In the Wild: Lemurs with John Cleese” was a labor of love. He has been drawn to lemurs ever since he was a college student, periodically sneaking away to the Bristol Zoo to see them. In the video, Cleese gushed, “I adore lemurs. They're extremely gentle, well-mannered, pretty, and yet great fun. I should have married one.”

The documentary followed an undertaking to repatriate a family of five U.S.-bred lemurs to the rainforests of Madagascar's Betampona Reserve. Those lemurs were released into the native population to mate and introduce new genes to fortify the health of their dwindling numbers. “So they don't become too inbred,” explained Cleese as he tramped through the jungle foliage. “Otherwise, they would get like the British upper class.”

Cleese and his film crew visited the island five months after the American lemur family arrived, to locate them in the wild and see how they were doing.

The Carolina Connection

Tish found a connection to North Carolina included in that documentary. The lemurs Cleese searched for were dubbed “The Carolina Five,” because they came from the Duke Lemur Center, a sanctuary managed by Duke University that provides a home to approximately 250 animals. Like the rest of the Forest City viewers, Gilda Deck was surprised. “I had no idea they were here in North Carolina,” she said.

Since the Duke lemurs were wearing tracking tags, Cleese and his crew used scanners to find them but only managed to film them from a distance. Other lemur species on the island allowed Cleese to get closer as they displayed amusing, human-like behaviors shown in the video. Some lemurs begin their day by sunbathing, sitting upright in a Buddha-like meditation pose. The Sifaka lemur walks upright instead of on all fours. It can gracefully leap from tree to tree like a human acrobat or sashay across the sand like a ballet dancer. Most comically, it can leap sideways for several yards, then turn to leap sideways in another direction.

In his silly fashion, Cleese imitated the lemur leaps and side-steps for his camera crew and viewers at home. Forest City residents joined the fun by also trying to mimic his lemur dance moves while using their walkers (while associates kept a watchful eye). Resident Johnnie Street said that Cleese



“was funny, and did a good job of explaining things.”

Everyone who watched the video found these creatures “just as cute as they could be,” according to Gilda Deck. But they were dismayed to learn that these adorable animals are endangered. 15 lemur species have already been wiped out, and those that remain are threatened by extinction, due to habitat destruction. Slash-and-burn corporate agriculture has destroyed 90percent of Madagascar’s forests.

So the Brookdale Forest City residents used a special piece of technology to discover how they could help the lemurs.

The InTouch Screen

InTouch is a large touchscreen display designed for people who might otherwise feel intimidated by a computer. From a menu of onscreen options, users simply touch the name of the task they want to perform. Brookdale residents use their community InTouch screen to listen to music, play games, find information on the Internet, send email, or create their own personal social network pages.

Tish and several residents used InTouch to visit the website for the Duke Lemur Center (Lemur.Duke.edu) where they discovered the charity fundraising program, “Adopt a Lemur,” in which donors can “adopt” a lemur for as little as \$50 and receive a lemur’s photo, biography, and a certificate of “adoption.” The residents said, “We want to adopt one.” Ruth Taylor wanted to name their adopted lemur. “My first choice is Oscar. If that name is taken, my second choice is Elvis.”



Early arrivals gather to bid on their favorite designer handbags at the “Adopt a Lemur” Charity Auction.

Brookdale Seniors Save Lemurs

Tish turned to Kristina McNeil, Sales & Marketing Director at Brookdale Forest City, for fundraising ideas. Kristina suggested a pocketbook and handbag auction, offering several from her collection.

Residents went to work, soliciting auction donations from their neighbors, families, friends, and outside partners. Donations included brand names like Prada, Coach, and

Dooney & Bourke. While resident Ruth Taylor and her neighbors prepared the bags for display, she joked, “It’s too bad there wasn’t any money left in them.” Residents also helped promote and host the event.

Tish served as auctioneer, having perfected the rhythm and fast pace of an auctioneer’s voice at previous events. Competing bids for the pocketbooks, handbags, and purses raised a total of \$200 that day – enough to adopt four lemurs.

Sanctuaries for Residents Great and Small

At the Duke Lemur Center, 250 lemur residents roam the forest, climb trees, play, pick their favorite foods from branches, and sunbathe. Since they are protected and cared for by staff, they are free to do as they wish each day.

Brookdale Forest City is also a sanctuary. The assistance residents receive gives them the freedom to do as they please. They can be entertained, learn a new skill, practice a hobby, surf the Internet – or plan a charity event to save a wide-eyed, furry-faced creature.

A senior community helped a lemur community. Making the world a better place is part of living an Optimum Life.

