



the Blue Bell
FOUNDATION FOR CATS
ENSURING YOUR CAT'S FUTURE

The Story of Blue Bell: A Virtual Tour Through Space & Time

By Lynette Brasfield



Blue Bell...

A Unique and Special Place

In a turbulent and chaotic world, it is often difficult to find a place of peace and tranquility — a sanctuary rich with the sights and sounds of nature in all its glory.

Nestled in the majestic foothills of Laguna Canyon, the Blue Bell Foundation for Cats is just such a place.

Home to senior cats whose owners can no longer care for them, Blue Bell nurtures its feline residents and enriches the special people that care for them.

Started more than 30 years ago by Bertha Yergat and sustained by Susan and John Hamil, there are endless stories to be told about its evolution, resident cats, dedicated staff and volunteers and its historical ties to Laguna Beach.

The Story of Blue Bell is a virtual tour that transports you on a wondrous ride through space and time. We hope you enjoy the journey as much as we have.

Susan Hamil

Chairwoman of the Board of Directors

Jeff Zakaryan

Chairman of the Advisory Board



Blue Bell Foundation for Cats is a Quintessentially Lagunan Phenomenon...



... a microcosm of the quiriness, glorious wild flowers, sunny climate, and quixotic characters that make this coastal village such a special place – not to mention the bobcats that roam its surrounding 24,000 acres of wilderness. And, just like Laguna, Blue Bell has faced a few disasters, but has always emerged resilient and ready for new challenges in a changing world.

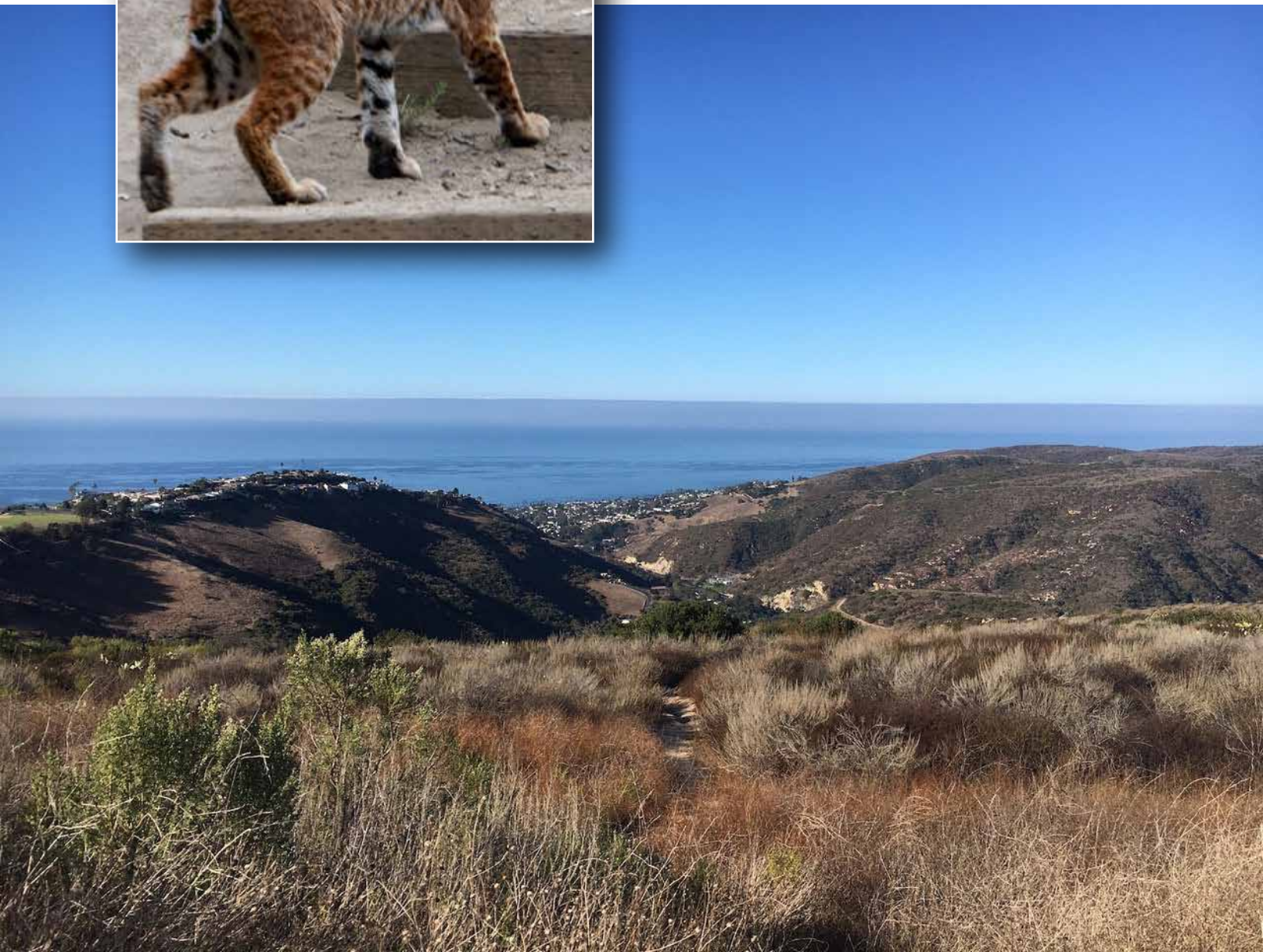




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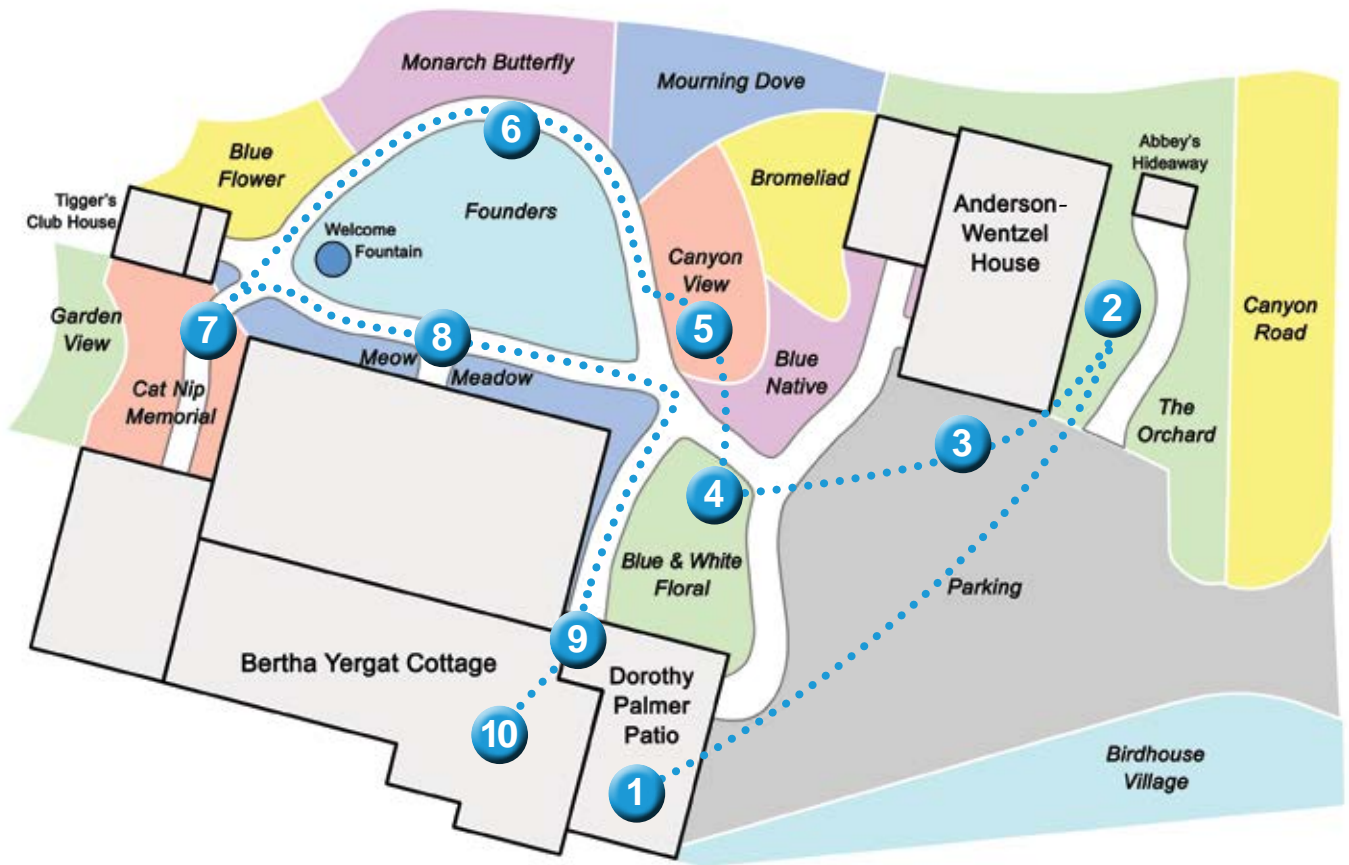
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Come On In!

Stops Along the Way



Meow's the Time to Learn All About Blue Bell!

Stop One: Palmer Patio

Welcome to Blue Bell Foundation for Cats!

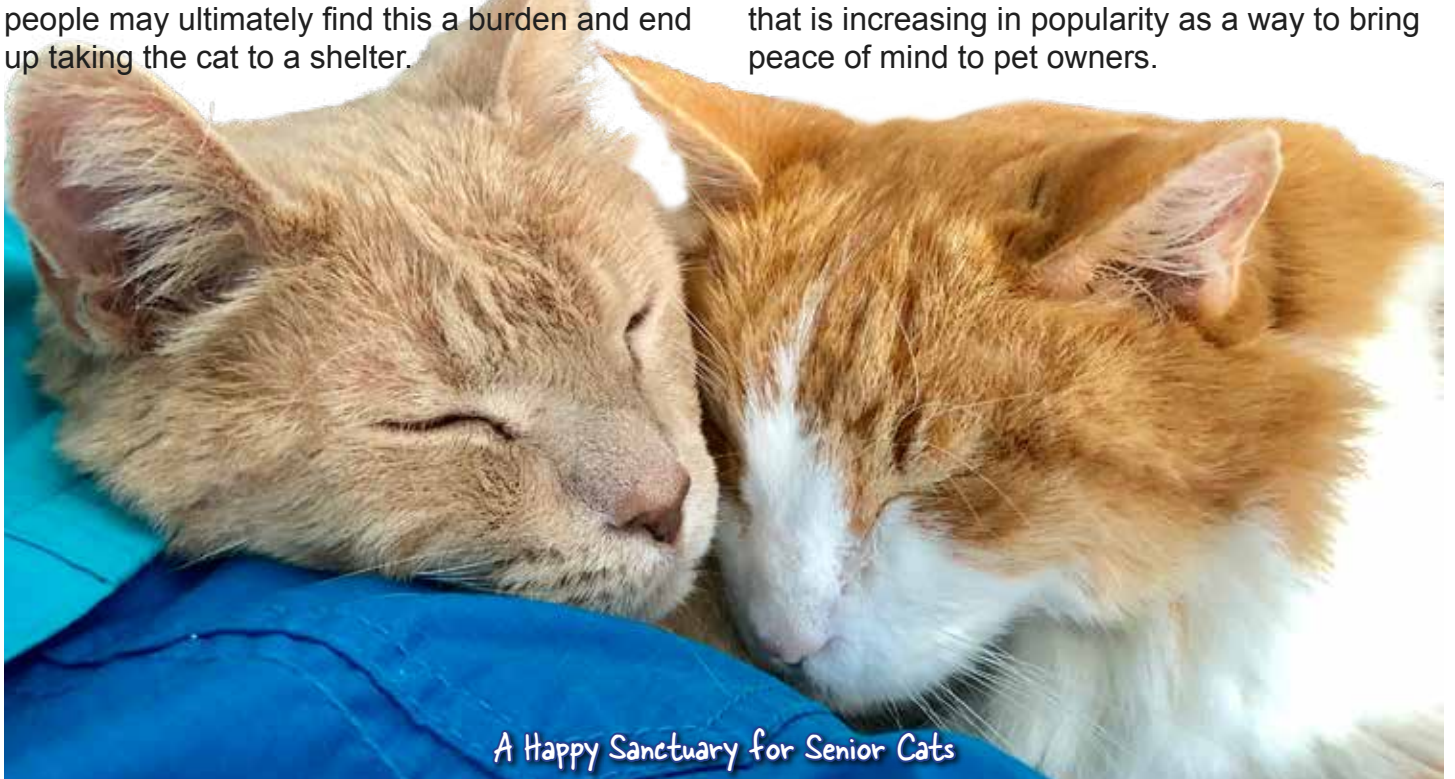
Blue Bell offers loving and compassionate care for senior cats whose owners can't care for their pets any longer, because of relocation, illness, or death. This is their beloved cats' retirement sanctuary.

Think about it: most cat owners take loving care of their pets, and yet don't think ahead to the time when they might not be able to provide for them. Sometimes they assume that a friend or relative will adopt their cats, but even when this does happen, often the most well-meaning of people may ultimately find this a burden and end up taking the cat to a shelter.

This is particularly the case with senior cats, who, like humans, often require expensive medical procedures to deal with age-related disease and illness such as diabetes and kidney problems.

Senior cats in shelters typically don't get adopted, which is just sad for the older cat who is already dealing with the stress of losing its owner. And if the shelter isn't a no-kill, the cat won't be kept for long...

Enter the concept of estate planning that includes lifetime provisions for pet care, an idea that is increasing in popularity as a way to bring peace of mind to pet owners.



A Happy Sanctuary for Senior Cats

Categorically a Great Place to Retire

So what do you think senior cats wish for in their retirement? Do they dream of being able to sleep in, getting 23 hours of shut-eye instead of their youthful 20? Do they long to lie on a warm windowsill, watching the birds and the bees? Enjoy tasty food and the best in medical care? Do they long to be with companions who will comfort them until the end?

We think so. In fact, we're pretty sure cats aren't that different from their human counterparts – except, perhaps, for the part about lying on windowsills... And that's why Blue Bell has created this sanctuary in two spacious cottages with sunny patios – we call them “catios” – surrounded by plants and flowers buzzing with insect life.



Blue Bell, founded in 1989, was the vision of Bertha Gray Yergat, who bequeathed her home for just this purpose.

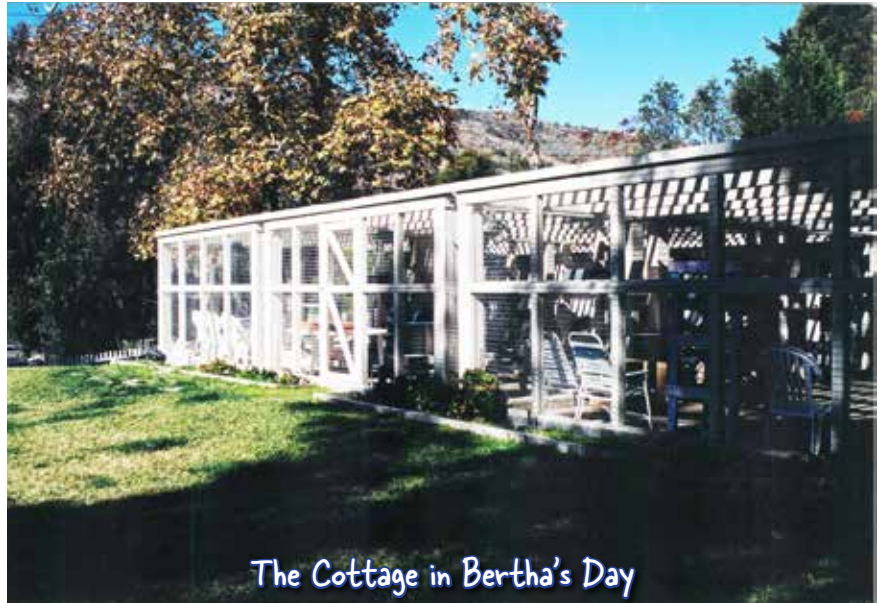
We're standing in front of what we call the Upper House, where most of our 50 cats live. We'll pay a quick visit to these fine furry creatures at the end of our tour.

In the past, numerous cats were adopted into loving homes, but the majority have happily lived their whole lives here and ended their days in comfort and peace. We now limit our population to approximately 50 cats to ensure quality care.

We've made a promise to owners that their cats will enjoy the pampered Blue Bell lifestyle, and so we keep to our commitment.



Hiss-tory of the Cottage



The Cottage in Bertha's Day

This cottage has an interesting history. Have you heard of the author Willa Cather, who wrote "O Pioneers" and "My Antonio"? Well, a close relative of hers, also named Willa Cather, grew up in this house, later bought by Bertha.

Willa has vague memories of Bertha: "She was a tiny thing, just skin and bones, but she was strong. She'd drag huge bags of food and litter wherever she needed them to go."

Willa says it was common to see bobcats, opossums, deer (which were a nuisance, and

ate the flowers in a neighbor's gladioli fields), raccoons, skunks, and badgers around the cottage. The Irvine Company grazed their cattle across the road in the spring.

Happily, Laguna now has 24,000 acres of wilderness where there's still quite a bit of wildlife.

Now let's head down to the Lower House, the Anderson-Wentzel House, where our newcomers get acclimated to their new accommodations.



The Upper House in 2015, with the Gardens Newly Planted



“I’ve Seen Fire
and I’ve Seen
Rain...”



Stop Two: Anderson-Wentzel House

Here we are at the Anderson-Wentzel House, or Lower House, where newcomers and our special-needs cats are housed. It’s sometimes known as the “TLC” house because it is home to some of the “oddballs” who don’t fit in to the larger community and need extra love. Health-compromised cats have separate suites.

This building is also a monument to Blue Bell’s ability to endure very challenging times.

Do you remember the lyrics of that James Taylor song? *“I’ve seen fire and I’ve seen rain/ I’ve seen sunny days that I thought would never end...”*

Well, Taylor had it right about Laguna – and Blue Bell! Most days it’s pretty tranquil around here, but through the years, like all Lagunans, we’ve endured quakes, fires, and floods – yet we’ve always, well, *clawed* our way back to full recovery. Blue Bell and Laguna are both stories of resilience and strength.



Photo credit Mary Hurlbut





In 1993, devastating fires raced down the canyons. More than 400 homes were destroyed. And we evacuated 125 cats – there were that many in residence at the time! Those of you who have cats know how difficult it is to get one cat into a carrier, so you can just imagine the scene and the loud meows that rent the air.

They were taken to El Toro Animal Hospital, some in dog crates because at that time there weren't enough cat carriers. Picture six stressed cats in a single crate – and the stressed volunteer trying to save their lives!

Susan Hamil, who now runs the Foundation, remembers that the fires came right next door. The winds then changed direction, fortunately, but still she sat there all night armed with a hose, wondering where on earth she would be able to house more than a hundred vulnerable cats if their home burned down.

Happily, the cottage escaped unscathed. And lessons had been learned.



Evacuation Planning

Nowadays, we keep individual cat carriers made up and ready. We also keep a cat census up to date, so we know exactly how many cats reside in each building. We gather their medical records and medications.

We put the cats in their carriers and assemble transportation vehicles, placing a towel or small blanket in each carrier. We also use Feliway pheromone calming spray for each carrier and begin separating the cats into rooms within each house.

We work closely with Laguna Beach Animal Control and we have a very active group of 40 volunteers who are ready to assist when necessary.



Cat-astrophe in the Canyon



On a stormy February night in 1998, an all-night downpour caused an enormous mudslide in the canyon. Susan recalls a “rumbling, shaking” sound like an earthquake around 10:30 p.m. By midnight, a huge wall of mud had wiped out some houses in the neighborhood.

The heavy rain pummeled the beautiful side garden, completely eliminating the grass. Water roared down the hill, tearing away part of the picket fence (found later in the middle of the road). Silt and debris gushed toward the lower building—two feet of which collected near the

entrance, jamming the door shut and preventing immediate access.

Inside, the cottage floors were filled with mud, the 19 cats inside traumatized by the ordeal, but sitting high up on ledges and all alive.

The Quilters, neighbors who live just above Blue Bell, have vivid memories of that flood. Ann was nearly buried alive, only her head and one arm sticking out of the mud, and a two-by-four jammed up close to her throat, nails exposed. Thankfully she was able to extricate herself.

The cottages were severely damaged.



The House on the Kitty-Corner



It took four years to renovate the cottages, so the displaced cats resided in an empty building generously leased by the City of Laguna Beach for just a dollar a year. It had been a nursing home. It's since been demolished.

Apparently most of the cats had a ball – they virtually all had their own rooms, along with running water in bathrooms, hallways to explore, electricity, and a kitchen where staff and volunteers could prepare their food. No word on whether there were TVs! But of course it wasn't home, and who wants to live a hotel life forever?

In 2002, with the help of our supporters, we returned to the canyon. Many kitties remembered their former hang-outs! Genny, a long-haired tortie, had a special basket in the main house, a spot to which she immediately returned after four years absence.

The property was redesigned to prevent future flooding.

It's a Mud, Mud, Mud World



On December 22, 2010, a powerful storm drenched Laguna Beach with four inches of rain within 24 hours. It caused major destruction. Laguna Canyon Road was completely closed for several days.

Miraculously no cats perished — but the event was traumatic, resulting in the evacuation and relocation of almost 100 cats.

The Lower House was badly damaged and the cats were relocated to the main house. The main house residents graciously accepted their new housemates.

To those of us who witnessed the 1998 mudslide, it brought back heart-wrenching memories. Fortunately, it was not as tragic as that. Proper planning when we rebuilt helped avert a future cat-astrophe. The cats settled in, their hearts healing, knowing they were cared for and loved, even when their little lives had been uprooted.

A year later, the Lower House was once again habitable, thanks to volunteers and generous donations.



Richard Anderson to the Rescue



Richard Anderson, Susan Hamil, and Dorothy Palmer

Our biggest benefactor was Richard Anderson, who recently passed away. Learning of our financial hardship, Richard bestowed a financial gift to augment the funds necessary for completion. We've honored him and his partner of 50 years, Alex Wentzel, who died in 2011, by naming the house after them. (Alex was a pet advocate in Laguna Beach who started the great organization RUFF, Rescuing Unwanted Furry Friends, and he was also a dear friend of Blue Bell).

In January 2012, reconstruction began. The revamped floor plan provides plenty of community space for cat trees and beds and spacious new separate enclosures with outdoor terraces for kitties who need monitoring. A new deep sink is perfect for bathing the cats.

Ironically, a steady light rain in the normally sunny beautiful Laguna weather put a slight damper on the opening festivities, an eerie reminder of the circumstances that led to the rebuilding.



Eden in the Canyon



Stop Three: Blue Bell Gardens Map

I'm sure you've noticed our magnificent gardens, Blue Bell Gardens. They owe their existence to dedicated volunteer and Chairman of the Advisory Board Jeff Zakaryan. He spearheaded the launch to turn somewhat barren land, riddled with gophers, into a magnificent Eden that attracts local wildlife and provides serenity (and entertainment) to our cats, staff, and visitors alike.

Here you'll find a map which shows all 14 of our pocket gardens, each with its own theme. We'll

talk more about the gardens as we move through them.

This area is The Orchard Garden. See the cats relaxing in their sun porches, their "catios." They love their ever-changing view of bees, butterflies, lizards and so much more.

And sniffing the catnip makes them quite catatonic!



The Orchard: An Edible Garden

The Orchard is a serene space dedicated to the memory of Irene Hobbs, the late wife of Dr. Ned Momary, a major benefactor of Blue Bell Gardens. Here's the plaque celebrating her beloved cats, Bonnie and Clyde.

The Orchard also includes a fountain, two white cottage benches, and a storage building called "Abbey's Hideaway" in honor of a special Blue Bell cat who recently passed away at 21 years of age.

The Orchard Garden focuses on edible plants, such as dwarf pomegranate, a lime and a lemon tree, "Purrsian blue" catmint, which repels gophers, chamomile (an aromatic plant in the daisy family), and artichokes. There's also a topiary cat head, though work still needs to be done!

And here is our Bromeliad Garden, personally planted and nurtured by Chris Lutz, Master Gardener, whose wife Bonnie is a Board member.

We'll talk more about the gardens a little later in the tour.



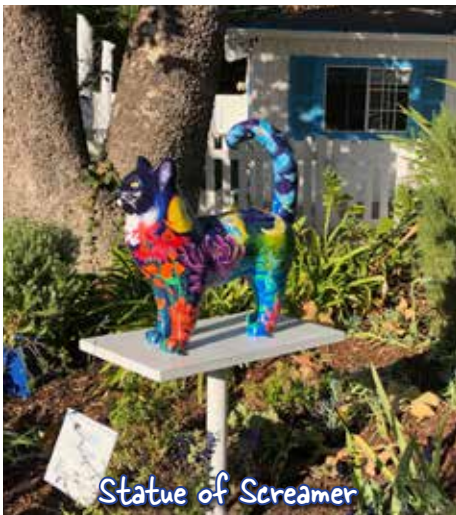
The Nitty Gritty About Our Kitty City

Stop Four: Screamer's Statue

Laguna is well-known for its Greeters, eccentric but friendly men who have taken it upon themselves to wave and greet visitors to the town since its earliest beginnings.

Well, like the town, Blue Bell has a history of greeters, most recently Screamer. This statue is an artistic representation of that friendly feline. At 17 years of age, she came to us in 2010 after having lived a year in a cage at the vet. She was clearly thrilled at her new home and was often our foyer greeter. As her name implies, she had a loud meow and loved using it. She was a darling cat and loved attention.

Here's a story about Screamer and Abbey, as told by Pamela Knudsen, a very active, long-time volunteer.



Statue of Screamer

"During an event at Blue Bell, Abbey, who often spent time in the office, was pawing at the glass door from the foyer side, appearing to want to join us. I went into the foyer, picked

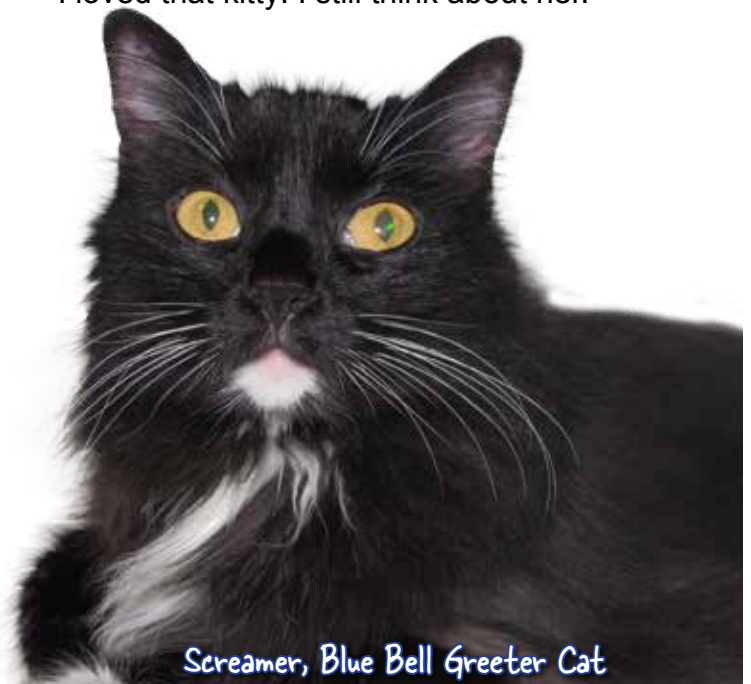


her up to bring into the main room, but she was very squirmy and repeatedly meowed as loudly as she could.

"Her typical meows were very quiet ones – raspy at best. I put her down and she purposefully marched into the office; half-way she stopped and turned to look at me as if to make sure I was following her, and she kept meowing. I could tell she was trying with all her might to be heard.

"I followed Abbey into the office to hear loud, distressed meowing from behind a large cozy chair. Abbey made a beeline toward it. I followed and found Screamer, who somehow managed to get stuck behind the chair. I've heard of feline rescues, but to witness and partake in one with my beloved Abbey was quite moving. Blue Bell kitties never cease to amaze.

"I loved that kitty! I still think about her."



Screamer, Blue Bell Greeter Cat



A Feline, Feline, Feline Life, After All

So here we are in front of the main cottage, where the majority of our cats spend their lazy, luxurious days. I'm sure you're wondering how day-to-day operations work with so many cats to take care of.

People wonder if there are lots of cat fights, but no, there aren't. Most get along pretty well or simply keep their distance. Most are senior also and therefore a little more mellow. The cottage is designed in such a way that they have plenty of space to themselves. You'll see when we visit them in person – so to speak – a little later.

So here's the nitty-gritty about our happy kitty city.

Cat caregivers provide the basics: food, fresh water, medication, and trips to the vet as needed. We have only five paid staff, as well as two janitors, Santiago and Maria, who have been with us for 25 years.



Ahem, I Need Some Attention



Joyce, Cat Caregiver, Attempts to Get Some Work Done

Volunteers come in on a daily basis, giving the cats lots of attention, snuggling and playing with them, working in shifts. It's a hard job, but someone has to do it!

Right now we have 41 active volunteers, ranging in age from 17 to 89. Collectively they spend approximately 80 hours per week with the cats. Some take on just two hours a month, others 28 hours a month. Our longest-serving volunteer came to Blue Bell for 20 consecutive years.



Pawty Time With Volunteers



Then of course there are volunteers who help in other ways, such as with events like our annual Cats' Meow, doing a deep-clean every month or so (though everything is cleaned every day, we want to keep the cottages as pristine as possible), writing and producing our "mewsletter" and website, posting on social media, and so on.

They also help to keep the comprehensive files on each cat up to date with notes about health, food, and more.

Says volunteer Terri Karman: "I've been a volunteer since 2008. The best parts for me are forming special bonds with each and every kitty! And I love being able to get a frightened newbie to become acclimated enough to allow pets and love, and the friendships that have formed over the years with fellow volunteers and staff. It's a day in the week that I really look forward to."

And volunteers have FUN! We celebrate Christmas, Halloween and other holidays with dress-ups – though not all cats get into the party spirit, and especially not into the party clothes – and we celebrate the kitties' birthdays, too.



BB Gardens are Must-See TV for the Cats

and a Gorgeous, Sensory Retreat for Humans and Animals Alike

Stop Five: Canyon View Garden

As I mentioned, Jeff Zakaryan has been a driving force in setting up the Campaign for Blue Bell Fundraising drive for much-needed funds – and creating the Blue Bell Gardens was his brainchild back in 2015.

A few short years ago, the land beyond Blue Bell's screened-in cat porches, lay barren, weed-infested, and devoid of life – save for the odd gopher mound dotting the area. This was the result of the mudslides we heard about earlier on the tour.



Barbara and Jeff Zakaryan



Today, as you see, the landscape is brimming with color, varied plant life, sounds of running water, wind-chimes, birds singing, fluttering butterflies, and every manner of lizard, bee, and ladybug. It's a thriving waterwise

ecosystem teeming with life, pleasing our cats, humans, and visiting wildlife.

The gardens have made a huge difference to the quality of life for the cats, mesmerized by the wildlife and insects, rendered delirious by the scent of catnip, and excited to see the birds in the birdbaths and fountains.

The canyon setting adds to the enchantment, with views of the hills, wildflowers, and sandstone caves.



Encounters With Nature

The project includes 14 unique pocket gardens and five fountains, along with some wonderful art, which we'll discuss at our next stop.

Oh, and by the way, the wildlife doesn't just inhabit the gardens – they dictate some of the plantings, gophers in particular wielding their power.

Director of Horticulture Sue Brown tried adding some burgundy Sedum groundcovers that would reflect the burgundy leaves of the redbuds seen from the Founders' Garden.

But the gophers didn't approve, ripping them all out.

Sue says that the gophers are a real challenge. Water is one of the main attractions, and it was thought that the fountains would attract their attention, but no...they prefer to chew on the irrigation system.

We believe in natural solutions here, so Sue uses gopher spurge, a plant that deters gophers. Still they've ripped up a few areas.

The battle continues!



Bees, Butterflies, and Benches

Sue moved from Wisconsin a few years back. A friend who volunteers at Blue Bell told her about the gardens and she began volunteering here. Now Blue Bell is one of her clients. These gardens are her pride and joy.

She loves coming here in the mornings. “At 7 a.m. all is quiet,” she says. “But by 8, the gardens are abuzz and aflutter with bees and hummingbirds and butterflies, as if they are starting their workday, just like humans.”

The focus is on different colors, textures, and sizes. Sue also gives horticultural tours, but for now, I’ll just point out some of the most interesting plants and shrubs as we move along.

As we head to the beautiful mosaic bench created by local artist Marlo Bartels, look to your



right, where lovely Iceland poppies bloom. The flowers look a little like yellow butterflies as they flutter in the wind.

To your right is also the Blue Native Garden, where we see plants including Santa Barbara Daisies, Blue Blooming Geraniums, Aloes, and Mulhy Grasses, offering distinct textures and year-round changing colors.



Art at the Heart of Blue Bell

Stop Six: Cats in the Canyon Bench

Laguna has long been known for its art. In 1903 artist Norman St. Clair arrived, the first of many painters who would form Laguna's Art Colony. Other early artists include William Wendt, Frank Cuprien, and Edgar Payne. In 1932 the Festival of Arts was founded, then the Pageant of the Masters.

Jeff's vision of the Gardens included an emphasis on art in collaboration with local artists and nonprofits. Here's a beautiful mosaic bench,

"Cats in the Canyon." You'll see that unique accents are featured throughout: a colorful art pole and birdbath in the Mourning Dove Garden, and also two secluded peaceful memorial areas.

Horticulturalist Sue Brown also got into the act, creating a moss cat in the Cat Nip Memorial Garden and that cat head topiary in the Orchard Garden.

We like to celebrate Laguna's quirky characters here, particularly those with affiliations for felines.



Crazy Cat Ladies

The recent passing of Daisy Mae Messer – another cat lover and unique Laguna character – prompted the Blue Bell Foundation to propose honoring her lifetime love of cats with a bench as well.



Susan Hamil knew all of Daisy’s cats, Sir Winston, Savannah Rose, and Sugar, very well.

By the way, there are opportunities for sponsorships of benches, fountains, and art pieces. It’s a great way to memorialize loved ones, human or feline.



There’s a bench “In Memory of Sammy” a resident who passed in 2016, donated by Vena Peterson who placed Sammy with us 15 years ago and also visited him. “I knew he was loved and cared for, which made



my heart happy! I will forever be grateful to those who took care of him and loved him as I did!” she said.

A Laguna College of Art + Design student, Rebecca Kruger, painted the statue of Screamer. We’re working on partnerships with local nonprofit arts organizations, including LOCA and LPAPA and hope to host a plein air painting event one day.

Let’s head toward the Cat Nip Memorial Garden. Look to your right at our imposing Echiums – this one grew from a tiny plant in a four-inch pot to 12-plus feet in one short year. They’re spiky perennials – bees love their small blue flowers. They don’t live long, though, only three years – unlike most of our long-lived cats, as you’ll find out.



Lives Well Lived

Stop Seven: Cat Nip Memorial Garden

This sacred Cat Nip Garden memorializes the cats that have passed through Blue Bell's doors and, finally, passed on to cross the Rainbow Bridge. Our cats live longer lives than most – quite often to 19 or 20, with several reaching 22 or 23 – whereas the average cat in California lives to be just 13 years old.

So it is that if a kitty dies at 18, Susan is likely to say, "Eighteen? So young?"

Recently, volunteers came out in droves to celebrate the 22nd birthday of Mittens, the "Babe of the Bunk Beds." The venerable tabby sported a pink bib and was crowned in gold at her pawty, where she received many pettings.

As volunteer coordinator Lindsey Arnette pointed out, "Our beloved Mittens has lived in four different decades, two different centuries and two different millennia!"

Sadly Mittens passed away a few months after her pawty. But it was time.

According to the magazine *Catster*, the first two years of a cat's life are equivalent to 24 human years. Each year after that is the same as four human years. That made Mittens a handy 104, no pawcity of years there.



The Paw-parazzi on Mittens's 22nd Birthday



Once a Blue Bell Cat, Always a Blue Bell Cat

We have access to ophthalmologists, dentists and oncologists to provide specialist care, and protocols in place for treating kidney disease, intestinal lymphoma, diabetes and other illnesses that elderly cats may contract.



And retired veterinarian John Hamil, Susan's husband, is always on call, whether it's a squinty eye on a Sunday night or a medical emergency at three in the morning that needs attention. (TV cameras help us see what's going on at night on the premises).

Our medical expenses are rising rapidly, so we are most grateful to our donors.

As our mission is housing senior cats—in most cases for many years—eventually we face the decision of providing palliative and hospice care for them, sooner than if the kitties were placed as youngsters, so we deal with this on a regular basis. Some of our cats pass on their own.



The decision to euthanize is not made lightly. We rely on the expertise of Dr. Alice Villalobos, who is an expert on “pawspice” – pet hospice care – and who developed a Quality of Life Scale for dogs as well as cats. We talk to volunteers who may be close to a particular cat, to the vet, to staff.

So a team of people who care about and know the kitty's medical history decide, and the cats are cuddled to the very end. Some are taken outside to feel the breeze on their fur, sniff the scents of flowers, and one last time catch a glimpse of birds and butterflies.

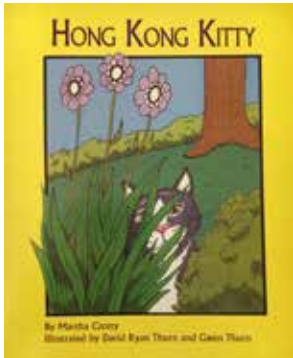
The cremains of our deceased kitties are returned to us in their own little cedar boxes, along with a ceramic pet plaque embedded with their individual paw prints and are displayed in our “Angel Kitty” cupboard.

Our cats are truly with us forever. Once a Blue Bell cat, always a Blue Bell cat.



Memories of Some Fine Felines

But on to a cheerier subject. Blue Bell has been home to cats with all kinds of idiosyncrasies. Every cat-lover understands that cats have very distinct purrsonalities, just like human beings – and some, like people, are quirkier than others.



Kitty, who looked like a china doll with her white/gray face and blue eyes, arrived in 2003 from Hong Kong, where she was rescued as a tiny kitten with almost no fur,

just before a typhoon hit. Her smitten rescuers brought her back to the States. After her Mission Viejo owner died, she retired to the comforts of Blue Bell.

Kitty even inspired a book, *Hong Kong Kitty*, by Martha Crotty.

That same year, **Bo**, **Elly**, and **Sweet William** arrived in a stretch limo after being flown in from the Midwest!

That's how well-known Blue Bell is internationally, for the



Sammy Palmer



Stevie Ray, Blind but Content

compassionate, loving care we provide to cats of all stripes...and colors, sizes, and breeds.

After years as a stray, **Mickey** spent his final months being pampered at Blue Bell. He was named after Mickey Mantle because he could catch food bits in his paws! Perhaps this skill was because he was a polydactyl, with extra toes on all four paws.

Sammy Palmer enjoyed head butts and chicken. He amused us by carrying around his toys in his mouth while simultaneously meowing up a storm.

Resident **Tasha** was a cover girl for Cat Fancy Magazine! She was a glamour puss!

Grey and white with unusual human-like deep brown eyes, **Roofer** was the first to greet you. He'd grab your leg to be picked up, and when successful, cling with his paws around your neck. No one could resist him.



Peace

Smokey Jill, a handsome Maine Coon, one of Blue Bell's long-standing residents, arrived in



1998 at the age of four. Prior to his arrival, he got into a brawl with a raccoon and ended up with a blind left eye. He passed away in the spring of 2015 at the age of 21.

Then there were two sweet blind cats: **Stevie Ray** and **Charley Wonder** – you can guess how they got their names. Sadly Stevie Ray became very stressed when evacuated during the mudslides, disoriented in his new abode, and died shortly after his return to the Cottage. Christine also remembers a pure white cat, **Peace**, who was deaf, and because he couldn't hear himself, he had the quietest, kitten-like meow.

Cody, still in residence, is a real character. Indolent, plump, and adorable, a handsome muted orange tabby, he's also a "comfort cat" and will often cuddle up to sick or dying fellow felines.



Comfort cats are good little souls who bond with other cats and actually seem, from our human perspective, to seek out and comfort other cats in crisis or physical distress. This behavior is atypical of established cat behavior thought, and not commonly acknowledged in any lay or professional community. But we know better.

When Roofer was dying, **Domino** snuggled her body against him and purred very loud. She'd nuzzle his head and lick the side of his face as if to comfort him. She stayed there for over 30 minutes until the vet arrived.

Callie, not exactly Miss Popular with other cats, was unusually attentive to both Roofer and Scooter in the weeks before their deaths. She would cuddle next to them.

Adam came and spent time with **Sammy Palmer**, which he had also done with **Fuzzy** at the end.

Houdie was another angel cat, snuggling to give comfort to kitties who were ill or dying.

In just a little while, we'll be entering the Cottage (Cattage?) for a quick visit with our current cat population.



The Bertha Who Birthed Blue Bell



Stop Eight: Meow Meadow

Here we are at Meow Meadow. See the catnip that grows into the cottage. The cats love it.

Also see the strawberry tree with the beautifully colored bark – the red berries aren't actually strawberries, they just look like them. Crushed up, they taste like peach custard, according to Sue. Rich in Vitamin C, they can also be used to make jam/marmalade.

But now it's time to talk about Bertha Yergat, who founded the Blue Bell Foundation.

The daughter of Armenian immigrants, Bertha was one of two children raised on a farm outside Philadelphia. She taught grade school there, moving to Laguna Beach shortly after World War II.

It was here that she began to acquire property and cats, notably this cottage.

In the 1960s she opened her home as a boarding facility. It was then known as "The Blue Bell Country Club for Cats," named after her favorite cat Blue Bell, who wore a blue bell on her collar.

Those who knew Bertha recall that she would reprimand any cat owner who did not send postcards to their cat while such "negligent" owner was away.

Sadly, sometimes people never reclaimed their cats. So Bertha kept them, and it was the birth of a sanctuary for homeless and relinquished cats.



A Country Club for Cats



Bertha and her brother John Yergat were in real estate and owned many properties, including this one. It's believed though that her money originally came from a settlement following a car accident during the war years.

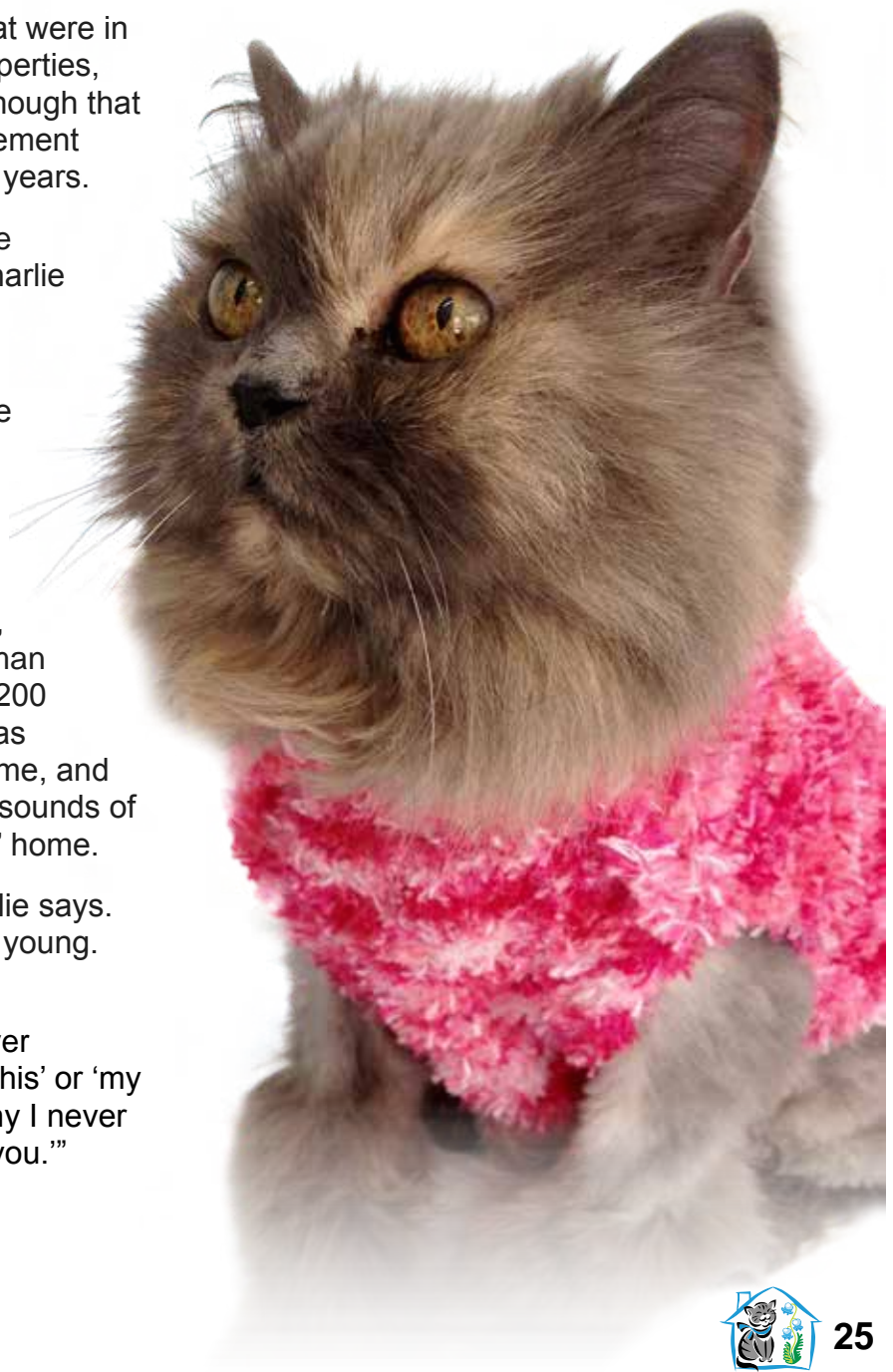
We talked about the Quilters earlier, the neighbors who live above Blue Bell. Charlie Quilter remembers moving in, back in 1972.

“At that time, the Blue Bell was the Blue Bell Country Club for Cats. The Orr family had a home nearby. So we used to joke that we lived between the ‘Orr house’ and the ‘cathouse.’”

The Quilters say that Bertha was feisty, loved cats of course, and tolerated human beings. They think she had more than 200 cats at one point. But they say there was never a smell when they visited her home, and only three times in many years did the sounds of a catfight drift up the hill to the Quilters’ home.

“I saw photographs in her home,” Charlie says. “She was very beautiful when she was young. But she never married.”

At her funeral, a friend noted: “Whenever someone would say, ‘my husband did this’ or ‘my husband did that,’ she’d say, ‘That’s why I never got married. Cats will never do that to you.’”



Bertha's Cats Were Her Passion



Friends remember that although not church-going, by all accounts, Bertha felt very strongly about the Annual Blessing of the Animals and had the Episcopal priest come out to personally bless her cats, also to her last home on Glenneyre, where she passed away surrounded by many cats – her family.

Bertha was extremely dedicated to her cats and worried about their fate upon her death. In 1987, in declining health, she wanted to ensure that her legacy of cat caring would continue. So she established a trust and a Board of Directors,

and the Blue Bell Foundation was officially established. Bertha died in 1989 at age 80.

Ahead of her time and inspired by her own circumstances, Bertha generously left this property for cat-lovers, so that when they died or could no longer care for their cats, they were reassured there would be a place for their beloved kitties.

She was laid to rest in a white coffin, a stuffed kitten at her side, and buried in Pennsylvania.



It's Hamil Time!

John, a veterinarian, and Susan Hamil took over management of the Foundation and still run it. Susan, who chairs the board, holds a special place in her heart for four-legged creatures. Many people know her as the Blue Bell cat lady, but she has devoted almost her whole life to the study, care, and enjoyment of all kinds of animals.

They met at the Canyon Animal Hospital in the seventies, where Susan fell in love with and married John. John was Bertha's go-to vet for her cats.

With 200 or so cats, and her own particular methodologies in cat rearing, Bertha had many conversations with John and Susan about best practices, and they didn't always agree. They'd argue over vaccines and nutrition and so on, but the animal hospital would never turn her down when she needed help.

Ultimately her cats were loved and well taken care of, so it was a relationship of mutual respect.



Feline Fine in the Canyon



Professional animal care is a passion that requires 24/7 monitoring. Both Susan and John have many times made the trek to Blue Bell from their own canyon home to provide insulin shots, or other meds that are required with time-sensitive, round-the-clock maintenance.

But Susan manages to balance her time with another passion: bloodhounds. She breeds them and has won prizes at national dog shows, including the Westminster Dog Show.

Have any of you seen the hilarious Christopher Guest movie, *Best in Show*? Well, that was Susan's bloodhound in one of the funniest lead roles, as Harlan Pepper's show hound, Hubert.

Let's stop at the Blue & White Garden. Here Sue has planted angel wing begonias and native sage. On your left is a pineapple guava tree which smells wonderful. The flowers are edible.

I'd like to talk about another stalwart supporter of Blue Bell – Dorothy Palmer, who lived to 102 and died recently.



Dorothy Palmer Helped Perpetuate Bertha's Vision

Stop Nine: Palmer Patio

We started the tour here at Palmer Patio, which memorializes a great friend of Blue Bell, Dorothy Palmer, who passed away in 2016 at the age of 102 – proving perhaps that Blue Bell has a positive effect on longevity for its supporters as well as its cats!

Dorothy's generosity was crucial in keeping Blue Bell financially afloat.

A lifelong cat lover, she was Blue Bell founder Bertha Yergat's friend and CPA for many years. She was also a staunch supporter and a member of our original Board of Directors. Dorothy herself also rescued and homed many cats in her life. Just three weeks prior to her passing she received a "Blue Cat" award at our Third Annual Cat's Meow fundraiser.

Seven of her cats came to live at Blue Bell after her death.



Dorothy was one of our many, many volunteers and supporters who keep Blue Bell going and ensure that our cats live happy lives until their very last days.



Everything's Coming Up Roses

Notice the gorgeous roses lining the Palmer Patio. They're nurtured by Judy, a volunteer, who was inspired to memorialize her favorite kitties that way.

"I started with a kitty named Half Pint. One of my favorite kitties was Abbey. To know her was to love her. I chose my favorite rose, the Double Delight for her," Judy says.

"Another favorite kitty was Smokey Jill. He only had one eye, and that kind of made him look like a Bad Boy. He was the strong silent type who cruised the house, setting the cats straight with just his presence. He monitored his crew!"

Other memorialized cats include Valentino, who was a Bluepoint Siamese. Judy also loved Harry. "Harry was such a cuddler with a heart-shaped nose. Seeing his friendship with Angelo was so



heartwarming. It looked like they were having serious conversations together as they cuddled."

I'm sure by now you've realized how deeply loved our kitties are, and how dedicated our volunteers.



Welcome to Kitty City!

Stop Ten: Inside the Upper House

We'll step into "kitty city" in the upper house in just a moment. This is where the majority of our cats spend their days, dozing, eating, playing, and watching the life in the garden.



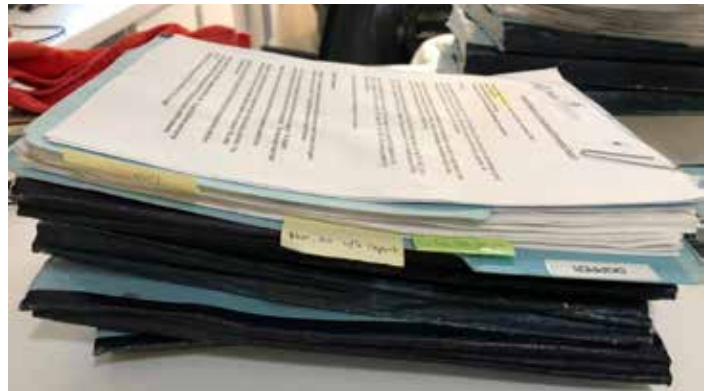
Thanks to donations and grants, the cottage has undergone quite a bit of renovation over the past few years.

Let's go inside.

This room serves as an office.

This is where Bertha would pin the dozens of postcards written to the cats by the owners. As I mentioned earlier, Bertha would get very angry if people went away somewhere and didn't write to their cats.

When cats arrive, they're microchipped. We start a file that includes a photo of them and



information about their date of birth, medical history, and special food needs. It is frequently updated throughout the cat's life.

New flooring, a redesigned floor plan, and consolidated storage cabinets transform these spaces into separate modern, efficient zones.

Separating office duties, meal preparation, and medical treatment is conducive to a safe, sanitary, and organized atmosphere which enables our caregivers to provide an enhanced quality of care. Our kitchen and office area expands further back and also includes a Medical Treatment Center.

As additional funding becomes available, the next stage will be new flooring and other improvements for the cottage's main living area.



Here Be Cats!



Tiger Approves the Mural Design by Local Artist Bill Atkins

See this lovely mural, created by local artist Bill Atkins? Susan was kind enough to ask him to paint in the cats belonging to two volunteers who worked on this project. Here's Cubby, and here's Boris!

And here are the cats!

Most of the cats get along pretty well. Some form bonds; others keep more or less to themselves. Cats were social-distancing long before people!

You see that we have lots of nooks and crannies,

boxes and hideaways, and high shelves so that they can all have their own space.

Cats prefer their own litter boxes and they like them clean, so we go through an average of 95 boxes a day for the 50 cats. Once a month, 60 fifty-pound bags of litter are delivered via forklift and kept in Abbey's Hideaway.

Cats with special food needs have their own little screened suites. And we even have a section for our "porky pussycats" so that they don't eat up the food meant for the whole population.

Very furry older cats are given a lion cut in summer. As they grow older, they become less fastidious about grooming, so this prevents matting of their fur.



Angie's Lion Cut



All Fur a Good Cause ...Because We Need Money in the Kitty for the Kitties!



Kitten Around at the Cat's Meow Champagne Breakfast

Almost every year, Blue Bell hosts the Cat's Meow Champagne Brunch, a gathering of about 150 feline fans, to raise money to ensure the future health of the Foundation and its kitties. The event is fabulous fun. Many attendees wear cat-themed costumes, and guests revel in cat auction items, readings about cats, and the pictures of cats on the tables.

Blue Bell also has a booth at the Annual Pet Parade and Chili Cookoff, a furry fundraiser where our own adorable Cody romped home (well, Cody doesn't romp, but you know what I mean) with the prize for the Most Adorable Senior Pet.



Cody Wins Most Adorable Senior Pet at the Pet Parade

We also participate in Laguna Beach's annual Patriots Day Parade, a Laguna tradition which features nearly 100 community groups and marching bands. Volunteers including Cheryl Arrieta, Terri Karman, Kole Carr, Cynthia McGuinness & Pamela Knudsen strut the route dressed in cool cat T-shirts, donning cats' ears and glasses while carrying baskets of stuffed kitties.

It's all for a good claws!



Taking Part in Laguna Beach Patriots' Parade



It's For the Birds, Too!

Blue Bell's kitties are in the catbird seat in their lovely spacious home, watching as hummingbirds alight on the orange and red flowers that grace the bushes. We're sure the cats would like to make a personal connection with the birds, but they can only look, not touch...or eat...



In fact, birds have a wide range of choices if they decide to live at Blue Bell. Sue Brown, our horticulturalist, has taken charge of Birdhouse Village. Every member of her family has helped build, maintain, and decorate the birdhouses. Each is distinctly designed and painted.



Meow It's Time to Say Goodbye

Final Stop: Palmer Patio

Thanks so much for spending time with us. We hope you have enjoyed this little tour and that you have a better understanding of the world of Blue Bell.

Please visit our website, bluebellcats.org, which is kept updated with our latest news, and where you can sign up for our “newsletter” and make a donation.

If you would like to contribute right now, here's our kitty for the kitties. It's really important for us to raise funds, because

we are committed to taking great care of our cats, and that's increasingly expensive as our cats age and develop conditions that need treatment.

Also, as you leave, be sure to take a look at our Canyon Road entrance garden which faces the front of our property with our monument. An original mature tree still stands in the center of a plethora of flowers.

Have a wonderful day and thanks for your interest in Blue Bell!





As a non-profit public charity, The Blue Bell Foundation for Cats relies on the generosity of benefactors to ensure our future.

If you would like to learn more about our Lifetime Care Program, make a donation to our Veterinary Care Endowment Fund or include us in your estate plans, please call us at 949-494-1586 or visit our website www.bluebellcats.org.

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And thanks, of course, to the staff, supporters, and volunteers who bring such joy to our cats every day!





the Blue Bell
FOUNDATION FOR CATS

ENSURING YOUR CAT'S FUTURE

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