

Adventure

Animals gobble up gourmet fare

By Lisa Simon
staff writer

When was the last time you looked up from lunch to find a cheetah or lion cub cozily dining at a table across the room?

Recent diners at Raphaels in the Sheraton Oaks Hotel didn't exactly share the dining room with furry critters, but watched as two guests of chef Keith Famie enjoyed their noon repast in the court yard.

"They're friendly, trust me, I have a big career ahead of me," Famie joked as he nuzzled the nose of a cheetah cub.

Three-month-old Leo, a lion cub, and seven-month-old Sheeba, a cheetah cub, were invited by Famie to Raphaels for a gourmet lunch.

The two rambunctious balls of fur travelled from their home, African Safari Wildlife Park in Port Clinton, Ohio, for the occasion.

The "kitties," as Famie called them, were accompanied by Safari wildlife director, Kurt Giesler, Safari general manager, Roger Vachon, and animal import expert, Nick Mainick.

"Nick and I are good friends. One day we were talking, and we decided we'll do lunch for the kitties," said Famie, a Farmington High School graduate.

"WOULD YOU like some wine with your food?" Famie asked Sheeba as the cheetah was served a platter of assorted raw chicken, pheasant and duck.

For a cheetah or lion, lunch, like every other meal, consists of raw meats.

Sheeba delicately lapped up the repast in a matter of minutes, while curious lunch and hotel guests watched.

"They're pretty much in control of themselves," Giesler said. Both lions and cheetahs regulate their own diets. On an average day, each animal consumes approximately two to three pounds of raw meat.

Although the meat was boneless, both animals regularly consume bones for their high calcium content, an important nutrient, Giesler said.

Sheeba was born in captivity in an Oregon zoo and weighs 50 to 60 pounds. As a full-grown cheetah, she will weigh approximately 120 pounds. Leo, just a rowdy ball of golden fur, will one day reach a ferocious 400 pounds. Leo was obtained from a Wisconsin zoo.

"I walk them through the park (African Safari), it gets them used to people," Giesler said.

Leo's rapport with people will cease in several months, when he is no longer a kitten, Giesler said.

After Leo and Sheeba enjoyed their meal, hotel officials and guests were served an elegant lunch in their honor.

Leo and Sheeba did not attend. Like babies everywhere they were taking their after-lunch nap, basking in the sun.



Three-month-old Leo, a lion cub, laps up a lunch of assorted raw meats at lunch at the Sheraton-Oaks Hotel in Novi.



Keith Famie, chef of Raphaels restaurant at the Sheraton-Oaks Hotel oversees his unusual guest's lunch. Sheeba, a seven-month-old cheetah cub, appears to enjoy Famie's generous assortment of raw meat.

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