

Hills resident says he saw a panther

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body. That's when I started shaking. I was so excited."

Capaldi, 38, had just taken his 20-month-old daughter, Brittany, from the tub and was drying her when he went to the bedroom window to open the blinds.

AT FIRST, Capaldi — whose neighbors have seen deer, raccoons, even a fox in the woods — thought he saw a large black dog.

Then he realized it was a panther, about 2 feet tall. "It had a large

head, the size of a human head, and a flat face. Its forehead was sloping."

It also had a 3-foot-long tail, about 1 inch in diameter. "That's the first thing I noticed. It just wasn't a normal cat. I've never seen a panther, but I've seen pictures of one."

Capaldi wanted to call the police and get his camera. But instead, he instinctively riveted his eyes on the creature for five minutes. "I didn't want to move from the window. I didn't want to take my eyes off it. Once I did, it was gone in an in-

stant." Capaldi, a Daniel J Salen hairdresser who moved to Farmington Ridge subdivision 13 months ago from Walled Lake, knew about the panther sighting reports in the Milford-Wixom area during the past year. But he never thought he'd report seeing a panther.

Panthers — skilful hunters — roam over a 200-mile radius. Four sightings were reported since April 21 in Wixom, six miles to the west. But no panther paw prints were found, Police Chief Philip Leonard said.

CAPALDI'S MOTHER, Stella Capaldi of West Bloomfield Township, baby sat at his house Saturday night.

On Sunday, after hearing about her son's adventure, she told him she saw an extremely large cat twice about 9 p.m. Saturday through the back-yard flood lights. "That made me feel a little better, that somebody else had a visual on it."

No neighbors reported seeing it. The animal walked through the woods south toward Lancaster. "I thought it might be hiding under

somebody's deck. I never saw it go back into the woods," Capaldi said. "But a Farmington Hills police officer who lives in Milford said panthers can take off like a bolt of lightning."

Officers searched the yard and woods for panther paw prints, but found none. The only prints found were thought to be those of an animal with a narrower foot span. "The police were pretty thorough," Capaldi said. "But the ground was pretty hard except for some swampy areas."

CONCERN ABOUT the safety of

neighborhood youngsters prompted him to call police. "It's really peaceful here. Kids often fish in the pond or play in the woods."

His daughter is too young to play alone in the yard. But son Victor, 11, often rides his three-wheeler through the woods. "I think he'll be a little more cautious," Capaldi said. "He told me yesterday he's a little afraid to go near the pond now."

Capaldi doesn't know whether the big cat will make a cameo appearance. "It's probably a one-in-a-lifetime thing. But I've got my video camera ready — just in case."

Funding sources eyed

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was kicked off with a wine and cheese party Tuesday at the center, on Farmington Road. The fundraiser will run through Tuesday, June 9.

In light of the center's financial difficulties, reaching the \$35,000 goal set for the fund drive — targeted to corporations, businesses and professionals — is essential, according to center officials.

In the center's 1987-88 \$300,000 budget, \$87,000 of the revenue is expected to come from contributions (corporate and individual). The individual fund drive — kicked off in February — fell \$15,000, \$17,000 short, said Betty Paine, executive director.

IN ADDITION to the letters mailed to members of the business community, a second letter is being mailed to individual contributors in an attempt to reach the \$87,000 annual contribution goal, Paine said.

"We have a lot of people who are very concerned about the center, but they just don't know what to do," Paine said.

Twenty-five volunteers will contact at least 10 businesses each. But the center still needs at least 10 more volunteers. "We have to have at least 35," Finley said. "It doesn't take that long to contact for contributions."

In the past, the corporate campaign was spearheaded by a member of the center's financial development committee. But with the importance placed on this year's fund-raiser, the center's entire board of directors is running the campaign, Paine said.

Contributors — many who use the center for meetings, seminars

and receptions — will be recognized in the Farmington Observer and the center's annual report. Major donors are listed on a permanent plaque in the center.

Finley last week documented the 19-year-old center's deteriorating financial status to the Farmington and Farmington Hills city councils. The center is about \$19,000 in the red. Contributions — representing 25 percent of the center's total gross revenues — are decreasing even though the number of contributors are increasing, said center treasurer Richard Wells.

OPERATING INCOME has decreased while the center's expenses are continually increasing. Because revenues lag behind bills coming in, the community center draws money against banking line credit. When revenue comes in, the draw is repaid. But the center is having difficulty paying off the draw before it must again borrow on its credit, Wells told the councils.

Though "cash poor," the center has a \$165,000 trust fund (from the Angel Foundation). A membership vote to release the money — previously restricted by the board of directors for capital improvements — is scheduled for 8 p.m. Tuesday, May 26.

The center's membership is comprised of all those who contribute to the historic facility, Finley said.

Anyone with questions about the center or the fund-raising campaign should call Paine at 477-8404. Contributions can be sent to the attention of the center corporate campaign, 24705 Farmington Road, Farmington Hills, 48018.

Leopards are strong, alert and cunning

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easy victims, they may become more dangerous than tigers or lions.

Leopards are good climbers and spend part of their time in trees. Very strong, they have been known to carry carcasses of prey weighing 90 to 150 pounds 20 feet up a tree.

Meredith urges residents of Farmington Ridge and neighboring subdivisions in the 13 Mile-Haggerty area to call police if they spot a suspicious-looking animal.

"If you're uncomfortable, don't hesitate to call," he said. "That's what we're here for. Report what you see. If you have small children, just be careful."

MEREDITH SAID he's no expert on panthers. "Far from it," he said. "We're just out there doing our best."

Carl Anderson, Oakland County Animal Division manager, is skeptical about recent panther reports. That includes the county's most famous panther report — the mauling of a full-grown horse last July in Milford Township.

"We'd have many reports of livestock kills or missing dogs or reports of parts of dogs being found. And we've just not had many," Anderson said.

Anderson isn't saying there isn't a big cat on the loose. "People do have exotic pets. If a panther is set free, a domesticated one, it could come to a populated area where food is more readily available — a dog, a cat, livestock. But I don't think you'd ever see a panther from the wild in a populated area."

NOCTURNAL AND meat-eating, panthers hunt their prey at night. They feed on such animals as monkeys, antelope, jackals, muntjacs, peacocks, snakes, sheep, goats and dogs.

Leopards aren't the only cats known as panthers. The American puma or cougar or mountain lion — also known in the eastern United States as a panther. A few experts consider only large leopards to be panthers. Only the lion and tiger are larger cats than the leopard.

Leopards average 2 feet, 4 inches

high at the shoulder and 7 feet, 6 inches long. A big male might measure almost 9 feet from nose to tail and weigh 100 to 160 pounds. A big female may weigh about 75 pounds.

The typical leopard is light tan with many black spots close together. The tail has dark rings around it.

LEOPARDS THAT live in forests are darker than those that live in open plains. The black leopard is so dark, the spots are hard to see.

So many leopards have been killed for their fur that the animals have become rare in many places. The United States forbids importing leopard skins for coats.



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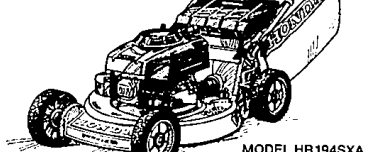
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