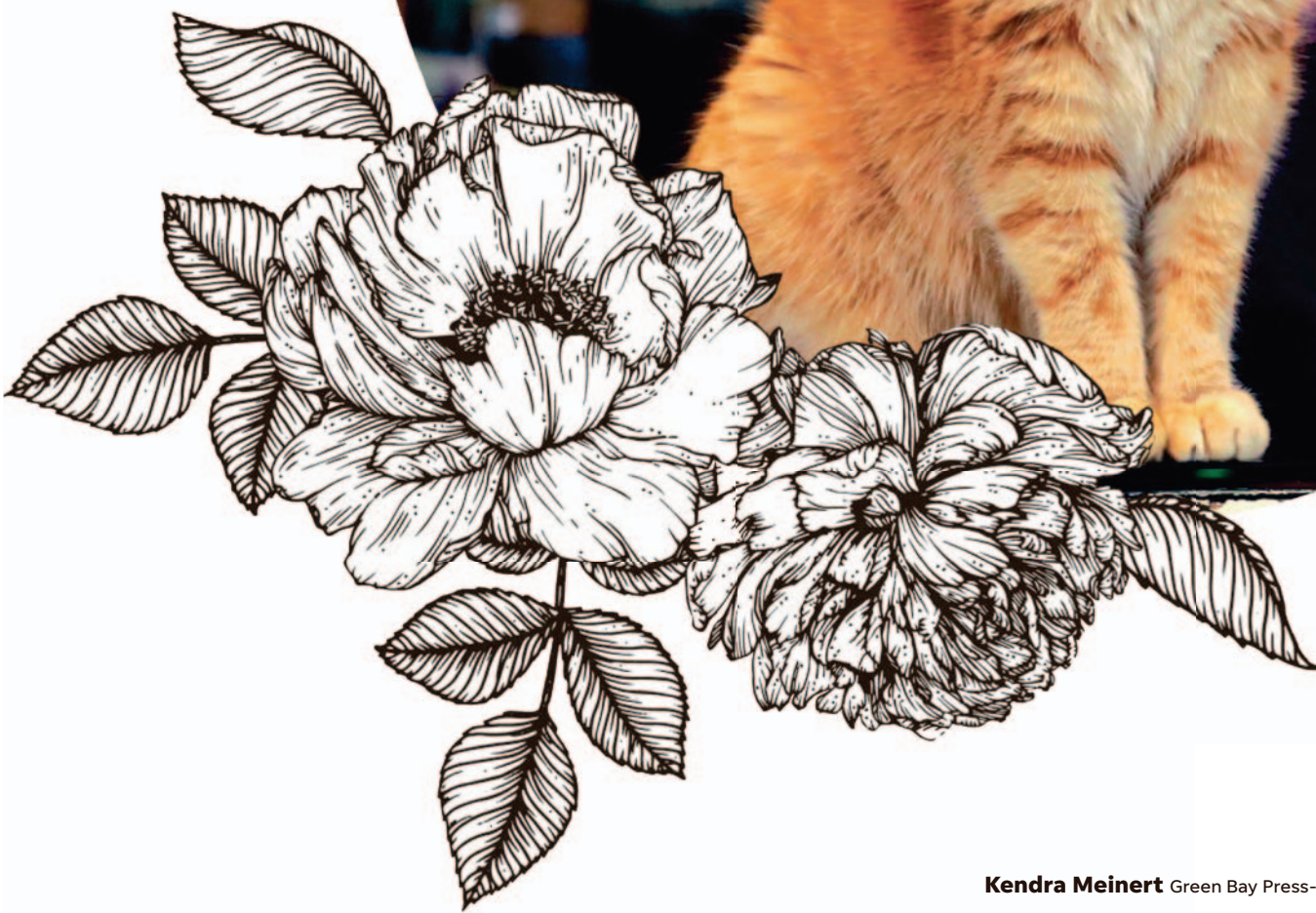


SUNDAY LIFE

The ‘itty bitty flower shop kitty’

How Petal Pusher’s Pippa Pepper went from a stray to a social media sweetheart



As the shop cat at Petal Pusher, Pippa Pepper gladly accepts belly rubs, photo requests and tips for the Wisconsin Humane Society-Green Bay Campus. She’s also happy to sit in on wedding consultations at the Broadway District floral studio. SARAH KLOEPPING/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

Kendra Meinert Green Bay Press-Gazette | USA TODAY NETWORK – WISCONSIN

GREEN BAY — You’ll find Pippa Pepper working the front counter at Petal Pusher most every day, unless there are beams. • Then all bets are off. • The cat whose business card reads “itty bitty flower shop kitty” sees to it that her schedule revolves around, well, her — this is a cat story after all — but also the sun. • If there’s sunshine coming through the storefront entrance along downtown’s Broadway, she’s soaking it up from the comforts of a miniature swing chair decorated with a garland of handmade paper hearts and strategically positioned on the floor for maximum rays. The sunbathing is so blissful in that little cocoon of coziness she’s oblivious to the brisk February drafts that come along in the door with customers or the ringing phones as Valentine’s Day, the shop’s busiest day of the year, nears. **See KITTY, Page 2D**

Ex-Packers linebacker Ryan discovers new passion with wildlife photography

Kendra Meinert
Green Bay Press-Gazette
USA TODAY NETWORK – WISCONSIN

Making tackles at Lambeau Field is one thing, but photographing owls out in the wild is a whole other animal.

Jake Ryan knows something about both.

The former Green Bay Packers linebacker who spent four years with the team from 2015-2018 has sat out in Yellowstone National Park for days just to get a shot of a great gray owl — a bird taller than a great horned owl and far more elusive than even the best running back.

“They’re called the Phantom of the North, because they’re so hard to find. They’re like ghosts,” Ryan said. “So when you do find one it’s a very, very exciting thing.”

An avid wildlife and landscape photographer, Ryan has awakened at 2:30 a.m. to trek through the snow before first light to capture moose, bears, bald eagles and foxes. Owls are among his favorite subjects.

“They’re just unique. They’re mysterious birds. It’s just crazy watching them and how they hunt and ... how they camouflage themselves,” he said. “I’ve gotten pictures of them that you can’t even see

them. You can only see their yellow eyes. How they can do that and be so elusive I think is one of the coolest things about them.”

To capture one in flight requires preparation, patience and a little luck. “Getting one of those shots is the be-all and end-all,” he said.

Because Ryan knows his way around a breathtaking owl image, he was asked to judge the Superb Owl Awards, an inaugural competition inspired by ... yes, a typo.

It seems football fans get so excited about the Super Bowl that on the day of

See RYAN, Page 3D



Former Packers linebacker Jake Ryan is an avid wildlife and landscape photographer. COURTESY OF JAKE RYAN

Music options abound if you delete Spotify account

Brett Molina
USA TODAY

Are you ready to keep on rockin' in the free world without Spotify?

Last week, Spotify agreed to pull rock icon Neil Young's music from the streaming service after he called out podcast host Joe Rogan, accusing him of spreading misinformation about COVID-19.

Young's decision spawned backlash against the music streamer, with the hashtag #SpotifyDeleted rising in popularity on Twitter.

Even Apple with its Apple Music platform jumped into the fray, offering a section of Young's music under the title "We Love Neil," reports The Verge.

The moves have left some Spotify users questioning whether it's time to bid farewell. If you're ready to delete Spotify, this is how to permanently drop your account:

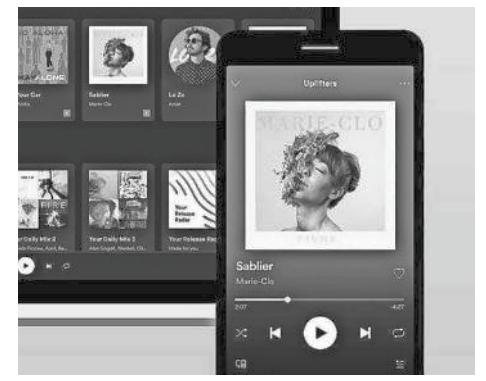
How to delete Spotify

If you have a free Spotify account, users simply go to Spotify's website and click the link to Close Your Account.

If you have a paid Premium account, the process requires you to contact customer support, which means talking with a support bot to go through the steps. During the process, this bot is going to try to convince you to stay. If you're serious, press forward with any prompts to continue to permanently delete your account.

Once complete, Spotify will email you a link giving you the option to reactivate your account within seven days. After that, your account is gone for

See **MUSIC**, Page 4D



The Spotify app is available on various devices. GETTY IMAGES

Kitty

Continued from Page 1D

She does, however, appreciate a little birdseed scattered on the ground outside for her eye-level bird-watching pleasure. She's not above acknowledging the neighborhood dogs who make a point to smooch a nose up to the glass to say hello during their daily walks, but they shouldn't expect the same level of enthusiasm in return.

As her official job title suggests, Pippa Pepper is so diminutive that visitors sometimes don't even see her there by the door. "Where's Pippa?" they'll ask, after they've walked right by her.

So on some days (i.e., cloudy days), she holds court on the counter, where her nearly five years on the job have taught her that people can't help but notice her, what with her handmade purple felted Etsy bed and the hand-knit blanket to boot.

"The moment the customers come in they see this little orange pile of fluff in a bed and then she gets petted," said Nichole Campbell, who owns Petal Pusher but is the first to tell you she's outranked by Miss Pips in the shop hierarchy. "She'll just nap and soak up all the love from anybody who comes in."

The counter is the perfect place to accept belly rubs, show off her legs with a spontaneous midday bath, do her patented slow blink when someone asks for a photo and knead her paws in contentment.

"She's a very good biscuit-maker," Campbell said of that last move. "It's cute, and she knows it."

There isn't much about Pippa Pepper that isn't adorable. At just a whisker over 6½ pounds, the pint-sized, green-eyed ginger girl is cute as a bug. A whole lot of cuddly in a compact package. People who meet her for the first time often comment how much smaller she looks in person. Maybe because, as her veterinarian jokes, Facebook adds 5 pounds.

The 8- or 9-year-old former stray — a lady never tells her age — has a big presence on social media. More than 6,200 people follow her flower shop adventures on her Facebook and Instagram accounts. Her not-so-secret crush, an orange Maine coon named Nacho Flay, has 246,000 on Instagram alone, but, hey, he lives with celebrity chef Bobby Flay.

Pippa's posts range from embracing the simple joy of an empty flower delivery box one day to glamorously channeling that Rihanna pregnancy reveal photo with the bright pink Chanel coat and belly jewelry the next. Sometimes it's a sweet encounter with a little boy who comes in nearly every Friday with his dad to buy flowers for his mom and see "his kitty" or it's Pips in Packers gear or covered in rose petals.

Food is a recurring theme in her posts, particularly lunch, as in what did her co-workers bring that she might be able to sample? She knows the sound of the microwave and gives whatever comes out of it two nose sniffs and a head bob. It's her way of saying, "What do you have and is it worth my bother?"

Anything with dairy, like cheese and butter, or bacon is always worth the mooch. Ditto for her favorite takeout, sushi from Little Tokyo next door.

"My husband made a vegetarian squash and black bean chili. She was not impressed," Campbell said. "She has a rather refined taste."

All that Pippa personality, coupled with the creativity of the staff and a workspace filled with flowers, makes for a cheery follow on social media. During the early months of the pandemic, Campbell would get messages from people asking her to keep posting, because Pippa Pepper was the bright spot in their day.

Fans who follow her from other states have stopped in specifically to meet her when in town for a Green Bay Packers game or other occasion. Cat lovers who can't have a cat of their own because of allergies in the family come in just to get a fix. Even non-cat people have been smitten.

"She's a great little ambassador for



Pippa Pepper finds herself surrounded by love and blooms at Petal Pusher, where she has been the shop cat since 2017.

SARAH KLOEPPING/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

her species. I love watching the customers interact with her," Campbell said. "She brings fun for us. Yes, it's extra effort, but there's nothing better than coming in on a Monday and she's all like, 'OK, give me my breakfast. Let's go. Let's get this party started.' It's a welcome that I don't think a lot of people get when they go into their workplace."

For Pippa Pepper, it's a far cry from life on the streets.

She was found as a stray with kittens

When Petal Pusher had to say goodbye to its original feline ambassador of nine years, 16-year-old Joplin Japhet, in 2017, it was a devastating loss. The dapper, long-haired rescue was beloved by customers. Campbell knew she wanted to give another stray a home at her shop one day, but it took time for hearts to mend.

She eventually contacted what is now Wisconsin Humane Society-Green Bay Campus and asked staff to let her know if a cat came into their care who might be a good candidate for the open position. Not every cat is well-suited for hanging out in a business filled with flowers, plants, glass vases and shelves with a maze of breakables.

"They immediately emailed back with pictures of her and said, 'She's here. Her name is Pippa. She's been waiting for you.'"

Pippa had been picked up by the animal control officer on Chestnut Avenue with her two kittens, all three of them very sick. One kitten died and the other went home with a veterinarian the same night to get around-the-clock care to survive.

Pippa had some health issues that required determining best medications, so she had already spent several months at the shelter when Campbell sent her email. Staff there had let her hang out in the offices and were well-acquainted with her sweet, low-key demeanor when Campbell decided to try her out at the shop as a foster.

"I think we knew she was a foster fail on that first day," Campbell said. "She walked around the corner and was just like, 'All right, I guess this will do.' Just immediately settled in."

Then Campbell read her file after the adoption. She noticed the day Pippa was rescued from the streets was the same day Petal Pusher said goodbye to Joplin.

It was meant to be.

She was likely born with arthritis that affects her joints and limits her ability to jump. She takes daily medication and has trained the staff to help her get where she wants to go. A meow is her

signal for someone to stop what they're doing and either lift her up on the counter or help her down. Works every time.

It's something of a wonder she survived as a stray given her mobility issues and limited hunting prowess. Campbell kids that it had to have been bugs and rainwater that got her through, but the damage to the tips of her ears from frostbite tells her she was out on her own for a while.

Pippa Pepper's hardscrabble early years might explain why she has no interest in the outdoors, not with accommodations that include two meals a day, multiple beds for napping, fresh flowers daily, a staff of 11 at her beck and call and an adoring public.

"People are always like don't you worry about her getting outside the door? She doesn't want to return to that lifestyle. This one is *way* better," Campbell said.

Shrimpy Shrimps, a little sass and giving back

The FedEx Express driver brings her Temptations Shrimpy Shrimp treats. It's no secret they're her favorite. Sometimes random bags just show up in the mail from fans.

"Once we gave her a bag, there's no undoing what we've done," Campbell said.

Glass Nickel Pizza Co. on nearby Dousman Street has been known to drop off a complimentary order of Nickel Nuggets with her name on it. You don't know delicious until you've licked the Parmesan off just one of the deep-fried, bite-sized pieces of pizza dough with your little sandpaper-like tongue.

During On Broadway Inc.'s Winter Wine & Beer Walk in December, there's one line for wine and one line to see Pippa — or Pippa Pepperoni or Pippa Doodles, as she's sometimes called. Guess which one is longer.

She's so popular on those nights, she has her own security detail, Pip's Patrol, to sit with her, answer questions, keep her safe in all the congestion and make sure she can duck out for a bathroom break if needed.

When the Farmers Market on Broadway is open for the season, she sometimes get so worn out by everybody who stops to see her she punches out early on Wednesdays and retreats to the back of the shop, where a velvet rope tells visitors she's officially off duty.

Don't go getting the wrong idea. It's not all paparazzi, high fashion photo shoots, free lunches and meet and greets. She pulls her weight around Petal Pusher, too.

Her power as a social media influenc-

er has brought the business wedding bookings, Campbell said. She often sits in on wedding consultations at a table in the back and has been asked more than once to be a flower girl. She politely declines; not big on business travel.

It's because of her Petal Pusher stocks all kinds of cat goodies, including crocheted catnip mice, collar charms and Meowy Janes Ultra Blend Catnip. She uses her entrepreneurial skills to help the strays out there looking for the kind of lucky break she got. A ceramic cat on the counter collects "Pip's Tips" for all the "fuzzy butts" at the Wisconsin Humane Society-Green Bay Campus, and she sells her own T-shirts and calendars (the 2022 edition was a quick sellout) to raise funds for the shelter.

She has a definite say in job interviews. She's directly responsible for one person on staff applying. Postings for open positions clearly state candidates "must be cat-friendly," and learning her language of wants and needs via things like "airplane ears" and head butts comes with the territory.

"She really is the boss," said Campbell, who considered changing her name to Pippa Peony or Pippa Pansy when she adopted her. Her husband convinced her to stick with the one she was given at the shelter.

It turns out it fits.

"She's spicy. It works for her. There's a little sass there, for sure," Campbell said. "She's not afraid to be a little bossy. She likes to be in charge. Typical cat, it's very on her terms."

She doesn't hesitate to raise her voice when the situation calls for it. Take breakfast, for example. She's a stickler for it first thing in the morning.

"I would use the word yelling," Campbell said. "She yells at us for breakfast, so breakfast has to happen immediately. If a customer calls, the customer can hear her telling us that she wants her breakfast."

She's mostly uninterested in all the fresh greens and pretty flowers that at-home cats often have a well-earned reputation for terrorizing, but if she feels she's not getting the attention she deserves quickly enough, she will play the plant chomper card. She'll walk up to a bucket of flowers on the floor, pull the tip off a leaf and then spit it out on the ground.

"And then look at us like, 'Did you all see what I just did?'" Campbell said. "Then, of course, somebody scoops her up and tells her that was scary — and then cuddles her. She's really got us trained."

Contact Kendra Meinert at 920-431-8347 or kmeinert@greenbaygazette.com. Follow her on Twitter @KendraMeinert.