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## Opening a cat café requires purr-suasion

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Melissa Pruitt believes a cat café in Tempe would be purr-fect.

Her concept, La Gattara, would allow customers to buy coffee, wine or beer while enjoying the company of cats up for adoption. The idea of a cat café was popularized in Asia, but has since come abroad. Pruitt's endeavor, if successful, would open the Valley's first cat café. She said she hopes to open by October of this year.



The project is currently raising money via crowdfunding on Kickstarter, in order to spread awareness and create proof of concept to investors and banks. The campaign is raising \$18,000 to help cover construction costs and secure a lease. As of today, the campaign has raised \$10,448 of its goal with 117 backers.

The fundraising has surpassed the two other crowdfunding attempts for La Gattara, where Pruitt said adding valuable "perks" and fun events has been the key to raising money.

But Pruitt said while La Gattara faces the initial challenge of funding, its next obstacle will be finding a suitable location. She said she initially envisioned her café in Old Town Scottsdale, but was struggling due to cost and convincing property owners that cats would be on the property.

"It's important that we find people who believe in us, who get the concept," Pruitt said over the phone. She said she is currently pursuing a property on Broadway Road and Mill Avenue.

As for health concerns for the venue, Pruitt said she has spoken with the Department of Health and made sure that her café will feature two separate ventilation systems for the café side and the cat room to comply with health codes. But the café does require construction of these features, which Pruitt said could be costly.

The struggle to find an affordable and suitable lease extends to another cat café project. Last year,

Sheri Geiss also proposed a cat café in downtown Phoenix called Mews Cat Café. According to the Indiegogo campaign, Geiss was unable to raise the proposed \$50,000 to start her business and talks with a property fell through.

The Phoenix Business Journal reached out to Geiss for further comment on the cat café industry, but she declined to comment on other feline project besides her own.

As for the cats themselves, Pruitt said cats would be available for adoption at La Gattara through Lost Our Home Pet Rescue.

The Tempe shelter said the café would allow them to adopt out more cats, which would free up space in their shelter.

Founder and executive director of Lost Our Home Pet Rescue, Jodi Polanski, said that because the shelter already has an open room environment, that the café would be another location for adoptions. Her rescue currently has about 80 cats waiting for homes.

"The sooner we find them homes the more room we have," Polanski said over the phone. "We're a no-kill shelter so it could really increase the number of pets we save."

Pruitt said the café plans to charge \$10 an hour for visitors in the cat room, but may waive fees depending on a beverage purchase. She said that having been to cat cafés and consulting with the North American Cat Café Embassy, she was able to find a price that fit the local market.

Pruitt said that opening the café would be a dream for her. Having worked in property management for over 20 years, Pruitt said she plans to quit her job if funding is reached.

The next funding event for La Gattara is this Friday, at The Grid in Mesa. The event will be cat-themed and help raise money for opening the café.

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