

April 2010

WILLIAMSBURG'S

# Next Door Neighbors<sup>®</sup>

VOL. 4, ISSUE 4

PRICELESS

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## For the Love of Animals

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Heritage Humane Society**



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Cover Photo by Lisa Cumming

I had hoped to take a "group photograph" for this issue that included our cat, but as any feline animal owner knows, that will only happen if it is the cat's idea.

In this case it wasn't. Cool Breeze refused to cooperate with the "family portrait" session and instead opted



Meredith Collins, Publisher and Freude

to lounge in her favorite place - under the lamp on my office desk. She loves the warmth generated by the lamp, but I don't think that is the only reason she spends so much time there. I'm pretty sure she knows she is constantly in my way when I am working on *Next Door Neighbors* and she secretly delights in it. Cool Breeze has had her way with us from the moment we brought her home from the Suffolk Humane Society about four years ago. I don't think that is going to change anytime soon.

Freude (pronounced "froy-duh"), our German shepherd, was much more cooperative for the photo session although the camera made her a bit nervous. We adopted Freude from the Tidewater Animal Rescue when she was three years old. She has come a long way since then. Freude is without a doubt the smartest dog we have ever owned, but she suffered greatly at the hands of uncaring and abusive owners when she was young and still has trust issues that she continues to make strides with.

If you are an animal lover like Joe and me, maybe this issue will inspire you to adopt a pet. Surely there is some empty space in your heart for the love of an animal companion. I'll bet there is a nice warm spot on your work desk too - one that is ideal for a furry critter that will remind you daily that it owns you. Like us, you probably wouldn't have it any other way! NDN



Cool Breeze helping with the magazine.



*D*ana Cheek, Executive Director of Williamsburg's Heritage Humane Society (HHS), believes that offering a touch of southern hospitality goes a long way toward making her guests feel welcome.

Today, she takes the liberty of assigning a well-groomed domestic cat named Storm with the title of Official Lobby Greeter to make

sure visitors get a warm reception as they enter HHS's brightly-lit lobby. Storm's natural charm and friendly disposition make her a great fit for her role as today's hostess.

"Am I the one you're looking for?" her wide,

## *A Work in Progress*

**DANA CHEEK**  
HERITAGE HUMANE SOCIETY

*By Ryan Jones*

feline eyes seem to ask as she spies a guest approaching her station in the center of the lobby. Her smoky-grey tail arcs gently, fanning the air as she walks over to investigate outstretched hands with a nudge of her cold nose and a dab

of her prickly tongue.

Storm, who is approaching her third birthday this summer, proves to be an excellent introduction to the myriad of endearing animal personalities that look forward to visits from locals at the animal refuge located just off of Waller Mill Road.

A state-of-the-art building that dwarfs its former location next

door, HHS provides an impressive respite for animals as they await adoption by area residents who value the benefits of caring for an animal friend.

Dana smiles at Storm's affectionate antics as



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NEXT DOOR NEIGHBORS APRIL 2010

she prepares to offer a short tour of the facility.

"It's so rewarding to see an animal come in and know that they are a work in progress," she says, passing a large, glassed-in room that gives a portion of the shelter's feline population increased freedom to move and interact. "We take the animals here under our wing and kind of adopt them ourselves before offering them to the public. We tend to look at them as our own."

HHS was founded in 1992 when the Williamsburg SPCA closed due to sparse funding. She points out that much of the work today is accomplished by volunteers from the Williamsburg community.

"The great thing about this town is that there are so many people who want to help," she says. "Whether it is with local veterinarians willing to donate their services, local volunteers donating time, or counties donating much-needed funding, we bring the resources together to prepare these animals for their 'forever homes.'"

Dana was born and raised in Norfolk, VA. She originally worked in accounting but an experience with her own dog caused her to reflect on what she wanted to do with her life.

"I had a dog that was about five years old. She suddenly got sick and temporarily became the focus of my life as I tried to find out what was wrong with her," Dana explains. "I didn't have kids at the time, and she was like a child to me. I did everything I could, but she finally had to be put to sleep. It really made me rethink what I wanted to do. I had always wanted to be a vet, but I was weak in science, so I discounted it as being just a dream. After my dog's death, I actually put in an application for vet school. Then I went to a shelter to get another dog and started volunteering. I just fell in love with the people and the cause."

After working for only a year at the Norfolk SPCA, Dana was offered a position as the shelter's director. She served seven years in that capacity before moving on to other job opportunities outside of animal work.

"I never really left working with animals," she says, recalling her volunteer work on boards and other animal-related projects. "It just wasn't my full time job. Eventually, I missed devoting my 8 to 10 hours a day to working with animals, so I went back to working with them full-time."

Dana is enthusiastic about the progression in the quality of animal care since she began working in the industry over ten years ago. Among other things, she appreciates the value of the Foster-Care program instituted at HHS.

"We allow some of our volunteers to take animals home that need

We take the animals here under our wing and kind of adopt them ourselves before offering them to the public. We tend to look at them as **OUR OWN.**

**- Dana Cheek**

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time and space outside of the shelter environment. A lot of times, they are just too young to be adopted. Ten years ago, if puppies or kittens came in that were not weaned, they had to be euthanized because there were no programs or resources to deal with them. We had to make difficult decisions. The decisions we make now are ones that you and I would make about our own pets.”

Dana credits HHS’s spacious building design for saving additional lives.

“We have isolation rooms that are equipped with separate ventilation systems,” she explains. “A lot of common ailments we see here are similar to the cold virus and upper-respiratory infections found in humans. If we notice an animal getting sick, we can pull it and treat it with inexpensive antibiotics - that way we’re not spreading the illness to the rest of the shelter. I worked in a kennel ten years ago where if a cat started sneezing and getting sick, it was euthanized. There were no other choices.”

Dana comments on other aspects of the program that help control overpopulation at the facility.



“Spaying and neutering have really helped us,” she says. “We have a mobile clinic that comes twice a month, enabling us to not only

take care of our own needs, but to also provide low-cost spaying and neutering services to the general public.”

To make adoption easier for area residents, off-site adoptions are frequently hosted on weekends by HHS in community retail outlets like pet supply stores.

“There’s still a little bit of a stigma about coming into a pet shelter,” Dana says. “This new building certainly helps alleviate that - it looks appealing and inviting, so it tends to draw people in. Just last week, three cats were adopted by Busch Gardens for their ‘Pet Shenanigans’ show.”

Dana remarks that a strong web presence also helps to increase awareness in the Williamsburg community.

“We host pictures of our available pets and offer additional information on opportunities to volunteer or adopt on our website at [www.heritagehumansociety.org](http://www.heritagehumansociety.org).” Dana adds that residents can save time if they are searching for a particular breed or type of pet by going to [www.petfinder.com](http://www.petfinder.com).

“You can type in your zip code and the site

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Frank Rosalie, Owner, with Cleo who was adopted from Heritage Humane Society in 2007.



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will pull all of the criteria that meets your match in any shelter that participates,” she says. “It’s a pretty widespread database and a lot of organizations participate in this area. You can narrow your search down without ever leaving your house.”

As Dana prepares to wrap up her tour of the well-kept facility, she turns into a side room to offer a quick peek at a litter of new puppies. One of the pups quickly makes eye contact, signaling an invitation to come over for a visit. As he tries to transform human fingers into makeshift chew toys, one can’t help but have a greater appreciation for the sense of mission Dana and the rest of the staff feel as they work among these animals.

Watching their patient dedication brings to mind an old story about a beachcombing man who spent time at the end of each day walking along a distant seashore. As he walked, he frequently bent over to toss stranded starfish back into the ocean. Many thought his efforts were a waste of energy.

“Why do you spend your time this way?” asked a curious observer one evening. “The

seashore goes on for miles. For every starfish you throw back, there are a thousand you will never reach. Do you really think you can make a difference?”

As the man picked up another starfish, he paused to look it over before tossing it back into the safety of the ocean and replied, “I made a difference to that one.”

Such is the case with those who take a few moments to visit Dana and her animal friends at HHS. Those who choose to adopt will likely leave with a rewarding sense of their own mission as they read the handwritten words scrawled across the sign out by the road: Adopt a pet...Save a life.

As one prepares to enter the spacious new facility, it is easy to envision looking into a pair of inquisitive eyes that articulate a familiar question:

“Am I the one you’re looking for?”

A smile and a gentle ruffling of fur might prove to be the perfect answer for those who find they are able to make accommodations for a new family pet.

With thoughts of stranded starfish still fresh

in mind, one can imagine an echo from a distant beach as newly introduced friends head back out onto the main road toward a lifetime of companionship:

“I made a difference to that one.” NDN

*Heritage Humane Society is located at 430 Waller Mill Road. You can help by donating funds to assist with their day-to-day operations, spaying and neutering; their C.A.R.E. Fund that provides medical attention to sick or injured animals; and for advertising costs that allow them to communicate their needs to the community.*

*Better yet, ask yourself if you have room for a new companion in your own home. All the money in the world won't replace the joy and love you can bring to a dog or cat that is currently living in small quarters waiting to become your friend. More than anything, these animals need someone to take them home.*

*For more information call Heritage Humane Society at (757) 221-0150 or visit their website at [www.heritagehumanesociety.org](http://www.heritagehumanesociety.org).*

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# If They Could Tell Us Their Stories

REGINA ROOT  
CANINE RESCUE

By Lillian Stevens

*M*aya is a six-year old German shepherd rescue dog who also happens to be a certified therapy dog. Her owner is Regina Root, Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies at the College of William and Mary. Like many of her Williamsburg neighbors, Regina juggles family, friends, career, research and a myriad of other activities. Unlike many of her neighbors, however, she also fosters German shepherd (and mixed breed) dogs in need.

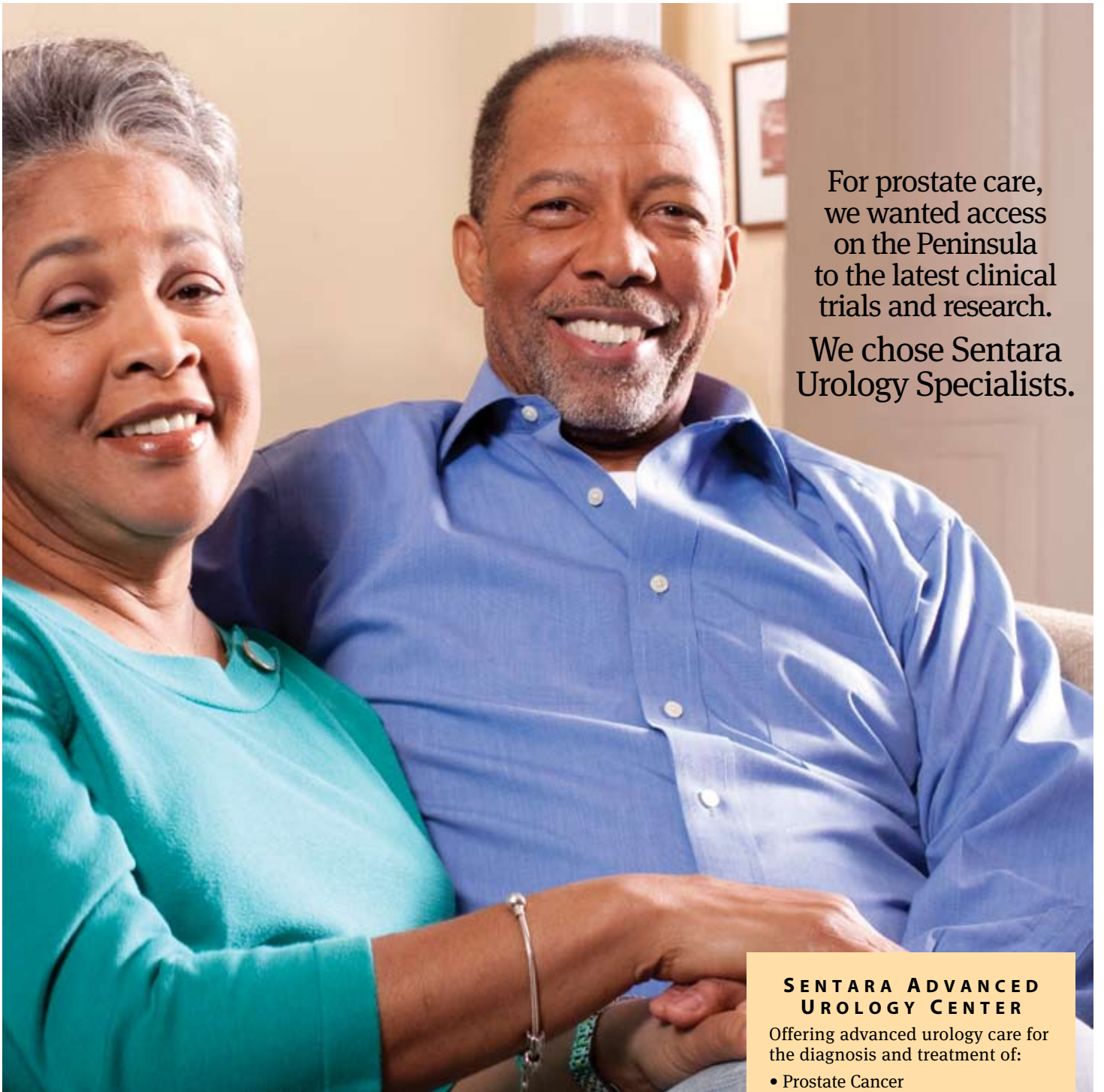
“If only dogs could tell us their stories. We were hesitant to bring a dog like Maya into our home. As a stray, she had no history. We soon realized how fortunate we were to have her join our family. She is a loving canine companion,” Regina says.

“When we got her, it was clear that she had been making it on her own for quite a long time, literally



Regina with her daughter, Audrey, and Maya.





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starving and with badly infected ears. After almost three months of daily ear cleansing, we noticed that Maya had a tattoo in her ear, a method of identification used for German shepherd purebreds of German lines.”

Research revealed that Maya was actually born “Zetta Vom Haus Brezel” from purebred German shepherd lineage. Her breeder was told by the previous owner that Maya had been killed. Sold as a puppy to be a show dog, Maya somehow found herself in the wild instead of the show ring.

However, she survived and was rescued by Brent Jacques and the Virginia German Shepherd Rescue (VGSR), an organization which Regina and her 8-year old daughter, Audrey, actively support.

“The Virginia German Shepherd Rescue is an inspiring community of volunteers whose common goal is to find good homes for good dogs,” says Regina.

Sometimes it takes a lot of time and effort on the part of many different people to find the right home for a dog. Every dog needs a lot of attention and care. Socialization and training is also essential for this large and active breed. Some dogs exhibit bad behavior when they get bored or are not motivated. In all cases, the dogs need human leadership to channel their energy into productive activities.

“German shepherds are, by their nature, problem solvers,” Regina says. “Since they are working dogs, you have to find just the right challenges for them to take on. While German shepherds certainly make great family pets, they also make wonderful guide and hearing dogs, agility or canine Frisbee competitors, and loyal members of search and rescue teams.”

“Maya’s job is therapy work, which she loves. She has worked with community groups like the Association of Retarded Citizens (ARC) at its festival on the campus of William and Mary. She has also helped us train the dogs we have fostered, leading by example.”

Regina’s affection for all creatures great and small began as a child.

“My parents were beekeepers and I was fascinated by birds. I raised canaries and owned many other pets over the years – dogs, a rabbit, and a parrot. In high school, I was named president of the Future Farmers of America and Horseman’s Club. I even received the DeKalb agricultural award,” she confides with a grin.

While German shepherds certainly make great family pets, they also make wonderful guide and hearing dogs, agility or canine Frisbee competitors, and loyal members of search and rescue teams.

**- Regina Root**



These days, though, it's mostly about the dogs for the Root family. Audrey helps with Maya's care and training and is proud of her own advocacy – from fundraisers at Pet Smart where she raised money for the VGSR by selling her own artwork – to educating her friends and peers in Brownie Troop 1001 about dogs.

"Maya visited our Colonial Coast Brownie Troop," says Brandy Boatwright Campbell, the co-leader of Audrey's Girl Scout troop. "The girls loved having a therapy dog as part of the evening's presentation."

Of course, each dog is unique and Regina says that her family has learned from each one they have been privileged to own or foster. Their first German shepherd was Kaiser, for whom the Roots will always have a special place in their hearts.

"Kaiser was a certified therapy dog and a great ambassador of the breed. He was the sweetest dog and a great comfort to me when my father died two years ago," Regina says.

Soon thereafter Kaiser was diagnosed with terminal bladder cancer, which is highly unusual for German shepherds, and died three weeks later.

Losing a beloved pet can be a singularly heartbreaking experience, and it is sometimes hard to foster dogs because the family does grow attached to them. But Regina and Audrey are elated when a dog is placed into a loving home.

"Especially if that loving home is in the same neighborhood as mine," Regina laughs. Such was the case with a young, playful, Dutch Shepherd mix named Gwen who lives around the corner from the Roots.

Over time, there have been other dogs fostered by the Roots, including Cina who disliked the suburbs and is now happily romping on a farm in Central Virginia. Then there was playful Katie whose family was no longer able to care for her. She was adopted last summer and is happy in her new home. There was also Neiko, an overweight "gentle giant" who lost 20 pounds under the Root family's care and has been living with a foster family while recovering from hip replacement surgery.

"Neiko is the gentlest dog and is so very sweet. He loves to play fetch, is great with other dogs and is available for adoption through the Virginia German Shepherd Rescue," says Regina.

The VGSR works with each foster to decide with whom a dog will be placed, especially because fosters learn a great deal about the dogs' personalities and temperaments. The dogs never forget those who help them find a forever home. Knowing that the dogs are with families who will love and take good care of them brings the Roots much peace and happiness.

"Whenever we can help a dog find a home, I am happy," says Audrey. NDN

*In its eight years in existence, the Virginia German Shepherd Rescue has found homes for over 3,000 deserving dogs, 287 in 2009 alone. They are currently enlisting active volunteers to help with the task of placing some really wonderful, but homeless, German Shepherd dogs into loving homes in which both the dogs and their humans thrive and grow. For more information visit <http://www.shepherdrescue.org>*

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# A Friend to the Feathered

BARBARA HOBBS  
THE FEATHERED NEST

By Linda Landreth Phelps



If you're tempted to make an impulsive purchase of a gorgeous macaw or a sweetly affectionate cockatoo, a better move might be deciding to have a baby. Ideally, children grow up and become independent over the course of a couple of decades, but that bird may still be around and needing care when your baby is a grandparent. Winston Churchill's macaw was still alive and cursing the Nazis almost half a century after his owner had been laid to rest in Blenheim Park.

Due to the longevity of her favorite animal, over the last twenty years Barbara Hobbs' career has evolved from businesswoman to avian rescuer. As the owner of The Feathered Nest, a store tucked in across from the Division of Motor Vehicles on Capitol Landing Road, her focus is a very specific area, one that fits well into her philosophy of pet ownership.

"I have rescued some birds from very un-

happy situations. I've seen them badly abused, stuffed in a dark closet, or abandoned in an empty house when the owners moved. I even found one at a yard sale!" Barbara says sadly. "But most of what I do is technically 're-homing', or matching up older birds to the right adoptive owners."

Her interest in her feathered friends began

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early in life. "I always loved birds," Barbara says. "I got my first budgie when I was nine years old, and did my first rescue at twelve." When she grew up, Barbara thought that a business that would incorporate her love of animals would be ideal.

When she first opened her pet shop, Barbara's large stock included all the usual finned, furred, and feathered creatures that you would expect to find. As she learned more about the business practices common to successful big stores, the less willing she was to remain a part of what she came to see as a flawed system. Barbara feels that as the pet industry grew, the demand for inventory led to overbreeding and actual cruelty to some animals.

"I sold my store and eventually reopened The Feathered Nest as a smaller place that was dedicated exclusively to avians. When I began, I used to breed them and raised the babies by hand, and I sold quite a few. However, I gradually came to realize that by doing so, I was contributing to a crisis in the bird owning world. There was a growing population of long-lived birds, and a finite number of suitable homes for them. These days I sell only about a dozen larger birds a year, and I would never sell them until they're weaned and no longer require hand feeding. A good part of my income comes from selling supplies and from boarding services. I have owners who will drive all the way from Northern Virginia to leave their parrots with me, and then turn around to fly out of Dulles."

Due to the longevity of some of the larger species, birds sometimes change hands many times, with some of the oldest having an average of thirteen different owners.

"Even the small birds like cockatiels can enjoy a 25 year lifespan," Barbara shares, "and some bird species have been known to live for a hundred years or more. I'm very careful when I sell my birds. I want the customer to realize that they are making an enormous lifelong commitment to the physical and mental health of this creature. In the wild, many bird species are monogamous and mate



*Milhouse*

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Dick Ferris

## Answers from your Estate Planning Attorneys at Ferris & Associates, P.C.

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Did you know that for the first time since 1915, the United States has NO Federal Estate tax? This amazing situation is scheduled to last for only one year, 2010. Here is the history.

The 2001 Tax Act gradually increased the Federal Estate Tax Exemption and lowered rates between 2002 and 2009. In 2009, there was a \$3.5 million exemption and a 45% top estate tax rate. The same Tax Act provides for a one-year repeal (2010) of the Estate Tax. It also provides that starting January 1, 2011, the Estate Tax would be reinstated with a \$1 million exemption and a 55% top rate.

For several years, Congress has considered a number of proposals to make better sense of the Estate Tax and reduce its uncertainty. These proposals have ranged from outright repeal of the Estate Tax to making the \$3.5 million exemption permanent.

Due to Health Care Reform and other congressional issues, Congress failed to act last year, and there seems to be no real consensus in Congress today as to what the Estate Tax Law should provide. In 2010, a congressional election year, we can expect intense political infighting between those who seek repeal and those that seek full reenactment of the Federal Estate Tax; and, if reinstated, it could be retroactive to January 2010.

Here are three likely Congressional scenarios to remedy this Federal Estate Tax uncertainty: (1) Extend 2009 provisions (\$3.5 million exemption and 45% tax rate); (2) increase exemption to \$5 million and 37% tax rate; (3) allow exemption to return to \$1 million in 2011 and a 55% rate.

If our firm receives any important legislative develop-

ments in this area, we will post the new changes on our website [www.ferrisandassociates.com](http://www.ferrisandassociates.com). In the meantime, you are welcome to attend a workshop on this topic, including the new at death cost basis rules, on May 18 at 2:00 p.m. or 6:00 p.m. in the Firm's Boardroom.

What are the possible next steps for the estate owner in light of this tax uncertainty?

(1) Keep your estate plan "as is" – wait for clarity.

(2) Add a provision to your estate plan that if there is no Federal Estate Tax, all of the deceased's wealth transfers to the deceased's Estate Tax Exemption Trust (sometimes called the Credit-Shelter or Family Trust).

(3) Add a provision to your estate plan that if there is no Federal Estate Tax, transfer all of the deceased's wealth to the Marital Trust with the right to disclaim part/all to the deceased's Family Trust (disclaimer is a legal "no thank you" within nine months of death).

(4) Add a provision to your estate plan that if there is a STATE death tax due that tax shall be deferred to the second spouse to die.

(5) Add a provision to your estate plan that allows your Executor/Trustee to appoint a third party (CPA, Attorney, Financial Advisor or Corporate Trustee) to respond to changes in the tax law or legislative changes that are inconsistent with the intent of your Will or Trust at your death. This third party is called a TRUST PROTECTOR under the Virginia Uniform Trust Code adopted in 2005. The Trust Protector Provision can introduce flexibility and responsiveness to future needs or legislative changes to Estate Planning documents as the result of our changing and uncertain environment.

for life. Captive bred birds usually become very bonded to their owners, and when lonely can fall prey to any number of illnesses. In order to be happy, they have to be an integral part of the family. When bored or stressed, they'll sometimes become quite raucous or start plucking their own feathers."

According to Barbara, these birds are smart and react to people around them.

"They are so intelligent! Birds really do understand what we say," Barbara remarks. "Raised voices or arguments upset them terribly. I ask the people who visit my shop and interact with my birds not to say anything negative in their hearing."

Milhouse, the shop's charismatic mascot, is a brilliantly colored Blue and Gold macaw. "Milhouse gets visibly upset when people talk about how much it would hurt if he bit them. Since he's quite vain, all he wants is to be admired for his great beauty," Barbara laughs.

Placing birds with just the right family can be a real challenge. Aside from the suitability of the people, the correct chemistry is crucial as well. "When I'm looking for a new home for a bird, I arrange a meeting and observe the body language of both the bird and the potential new owner. There are subtle signs that reveal to me whether it will be a good match. They have

an who had adopted a beautiful African Gray parrot call me and ask if I would find him a new home. Sadly, she had been diagnosed with a fatal blood disorder and wanted to make sure her bird was loved and cared for before she died. Another heartbreaking circumstance was directly due to the tough economic times we've been experiencing. A family who had been

It's no longer a one woman business. This has become a community effort and I couldn't do it without the volunteers' help. Last year alone, I was able to adopt out sixty birds.

**- Barbara Hobbs**

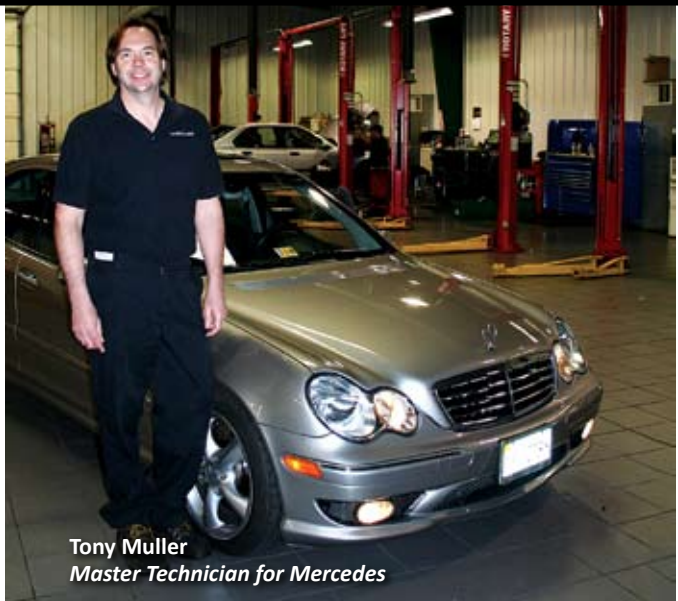
to choose each other."

Adding to the problem of an oversupply of young stock from bird mills flooding the market, there are more older birds than ever needing new homes.

"Any bird I have placed is one I'll always take back," Barbara says. "I had a young wom-

successfully employed when they bought their bird fell on hard times and lost their home. The family was living in temporary quarters that did not accept pets. Of course I took her, and the owner was able to come to the shop and visit with her until recently when they were successfully reunited."

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Barbara can give many examples of happy endings and successful transitions.

“One elderly widow called and said that she was failing fast and asked if I could find a home for Max, her 31 year old macaw. Max had never known any other home and I was concerned that he might not be able to make the transition to a new situation. But after eight months in my shop during which time nothing really clicked, I realized that Max was drawn more to men than women. He soon found a perfect home with a man who was already a customer. It’s so sweet to see Max happily snuggling up to Jim, his new owner, laying his head on Jim’s chest.”

Barbara has quite a job on her hands; she is there for her birds every single day, and on any given day of the week The Feathered Nest is a sanctuary for more than just its birds. Barbara often sees her regular visitors come in just to sit and enjoy the cheerful ambiance and the vividly colorful birds flying freely around the room. She has an extensive cadre of volunteer labor as well.

“You never know who will pop in for a

few minutes and run the vacuum cleaner,” Barbara laughs. “It’s no longer a one-woman business. This has become a community effort and I couldn’t do it without the volunteers’ help. Last year alone, I was able to adopt out sixty birds.”

Barbara’s efforts are truly a service to others and to the birds that are in her care. “It’s a blessing to have the chance to encourage everyone to think carefully before taking on this responsibility. Understand beforehand what’s involved in owning and loving them. They make great pets for the right home, but require attention, affection, training and discipline. Owning a bird can be so wonderfully rewarding - they are colorful, charismatic, and good company, but be sure to plan for their futures, because they are likely to be here on earth longer than we are. You must look at them not only as pets, but as a legacy.” NDN

*To learn more about how you can help with Barbara’s efforts at The Feathered Nest call (757) 253-2113.*

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— Jean Hampel, Resident

Chambrel resident Jean Hampel has always been an animal lover. Her late husband, Robert, started Williamsburg’s Heritage Humane Society. Through this endeavor, Gidget, a Yorkshire terrier, found her way into Jean’s heart. Jean and Gidget moved into Chambrel Williamsburg four years ago and Gidget is always by Jean’s side.

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# Greyhound Love

SUSAN ARRUDA  
GREYHOUND RESCUE

By Alison Johnson

As a child, Susan Arruda often passed by the dog racing track near her home in Miami, FL. She saw its lush landscaping out the school bus window in the mornings and marveled at its many sparkling lights after dark. On Friday and Saturday evenings, she and her friends would watch their parents dress in their finest clothes for a night of dinner, drinks and

racing.

Back then, greyhounds were novelty dogs, animals that Susan could admire from afar but never have as pets. She fell in love with them anyway, even as she bonded with the breeds of dogs her parents owned. When Susan got her first chance to adopt a greyhound, about 15 years ago, she jumped at it: she brought home

Cajun, a retired racer from a West Virginia track who had never walked on grass before and was afraid of birds the first time Susan took him for a walk.

Since then, Susan has turned her love of greyhounds into a passion for saving dogs that are too old, slow or injured for the racetrack. As founders of Colonial Greyhound Adoption,

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Inc., she and her husband, Victor Maloy, have placed 84 dogs in adopted homes throughout the Tidewater region over the past four years, 18 of them in the Williamsburg area. Every six to eight weeks, the two – along with other dedicated volunteers – travel to Richmond before dawn to meet a truck from Florida carrying dogs bound for families along the East Coast.

“There is such joy involved in connecting people with a dog that becomes the love of their life,” says Susan, an energetic 63-year-old who effortlessly rattles off facts about racetracks, adoptions and breed qualities. “It doesn’t seem like work; it’s just something I love to do. You get so connected with the process that it becomes part of your life. This is such an exceptional breed with such amazing stories. They truly get into your blood.”

Susan, a preacher’s daughter, grew up the middle of three children. A trained classical pianist, she met Maloy, an ordained Methodist minister, when she performed as an organist at his church. By day, the Florida Atlantic University graduate now works as a business manager for an aircraft corporation in Richmond. During her “free” time, Susan is busy

with greyhounds: communicating with volunteers in Florida, matching available dogs with adoptive families, making home visits, educating families on how to care for a retired racer and planning public appearances and fundraising events in the community. She also tries to travel to Florida once or twice a year to meet with volunteers involved with a shelter there.

Susan first heard about greyhound rescue efforts through a newspaper article not long after she and her husband moved to Richmond. The couple got hooked on rescue work quickly, serving in leadership positions for a Richmond-based rescue group. After moving to James City County 10 years ago, they incorporated Colonial Greyhound Adoption, as a 501(c)(3) non-profit in October 2005.

Many greyhounds begin training as race dogs when they are just three months old and enter their first events at 18 months, Susan says. Generally, they have six races to prove their worth. If they aren’t fast enough, they tend to be finished as racing dogs by ages 2 or 3; otherwise, they might race until about age 5. At that point, they are at risk for abandonment, mistreatment or early death. Susan has worked

with dogs that are very underweight, filthy and infested with ticks and fleas, although conditions have improved in recent years.

All of Colonial Greyhound’s dogs come from a track at the Melbourne Greyhound Park down the coast from Orlando, which has an on-site shelter run by a rescue organization. At any given time, there are 300 to 400 dogs in that single shelter.

“It’s just a constant, constant need,” Susan says. “There’s always a high turnover of dogs moving in and out of there.”

Colonial Greyhound generally places four to six dogs each time the delivery truck stops in Richmond, each pre-screened for a specific family. The match-making process takes time: if a family with small children applies to get a dog, for example, volunteers in Florida might take their own children and grandchildren to the racetrack shelter to find an animal that’s patient with kids. Susan has placed dogs that can co-exist peacefully with cats, ferrets and even rabbits, the very animals they are trained to chase (in mechanical form) around a track. Colonial Greyhound’s \$250 adoption fee covers that screening process, along with transporta-

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tion, spaying or neutering, vaccinations, worming, heartworm tests and teeth-cleaning.

Even so, the adjustment period can be rocky. After life in a kennel, racing greyhounds may be afraid to walk on certain surfaces or not know how to climb stairs in a home. Some are overwhelmed by unfamiliar odors, sounds and sights such as scented candles, perfumes, wind chimes and ceiling fans. Part of Susan's job is to prepare families for those problems and teach them how make their new pet comfortable.

"There's a lot of groundwork and education that goes into it," she notes. "We pride ourselves on that."

While many people think of greyhounds as hyper and even aggressive dogs, they tend to be quiet, gentle and friendly, Susan says. They aren't good guard dogs and, because they have little body fat and thin coats, can't tolerate extreme temperatures and need to be indoor pets. Used to running short sprints, they also have to build endurance to become good jogging companions. They require leashes and fences because they will take off by instinct – at speeds of up to 45 miles per hour – if something catches their eye off in the distance.

"So what you get is a great, big couch potato," Susan laughs. "They're very warm, loving companions. They love being around their people. And if you are out walking with a greyhound, people are going to stop you because they're curious. They're just beautiful dogs."

Greyhounds also have a rich history, which Susan first began learning as a child. The Bible mentions the breed by name, their drawings appear on tomb carvings in ancient Egypt and they came to America with Spanish explorers in the 1500s, proving to be good hunters of rabbits and other small animals. President Rutherford B. Hayes and Gen. George A. Custer both owned greyhounds. Today's greyhounds typically weigh between 60 and 70 pounds and live between 10 and 14 years, according to the American Kennel Club.

Susan, a mother of three grown children, grandmother of six and an avid gardener, owns three greyhounds, all retired racers: Candy and Eggplant, both 7, and Boflex, a 3-year-old who broke his right front leg on the racetrack. Pins and wires hold his leg together now and he can no longer sprint, although he can walk and is a playful and loving personality.

"That kind of injury is often a death sentence, because Bo is forever fragile," she says. "Most kennels don't have the resources to deal with it. We're talking economics – it's a business."

The recent economic downturn, in fact, has affected the 21 racetracks around the country, and Susan expects at least some smaller outfits to close for dog racing. Greyhounds also are coming into the country from racetracks and shelters in Europe, Mexico and South America, some of which have horrible living conditions. And still more dogs are homeless because their owners had to give them up for financial reasons.

All of that will create a whole new wave of dogs needing homes – which means Susan and her group's volunteers don't plan on easing up on their efforts. "My husband and I don't even think of retirement," Susan says. "My hope is that I will do this work all the way to the end of my life. And I mean the very end." NDN

*For more information about Colonial Greyhounds Rescue, go to [www.colonialgreyhounds.com](http://www.colonialgreyhounds.com); send an email to [adopt@colonialgreyhounds.com](mailto:adopt@colonialgreyhounds.com); or call 221-8332.*

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# Pain Relief Through Acupuncture

DR. MERYL LESSINGER  
VETERINARY MEDICINE

*By Erin Zagursky*

As a child, Dr. Meryl Lessinger would often bring stray dogs and cats home to nurse back to health.

“I just always wanted to be around animals,” she said. “I felt kind of an empathy for them.”

Decades later, Dr. Lessinger is still caring for

our furry friends. As a veterinarian and medical director of the Williamsburg Animal Clinic and Wellness Center, she has served the area’s animals for nearly 30 years, using everything from traditional techniques to newer rehabilitation and pain management treatments.

“I hope that I’ve touched people’s lives

through their animals,” she said.

Growing up in an apartment in New York City, Dr. Lessinger had only fish and birds as a child.

“Being a city kid, I was kind of limited in my exposure (to animals), but I always loved them,” she said.

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Though she wanted to go to veterinary school, she was told she would never get in.

“Back then, women were discouraged from going into veterinary medicine, so I was channeled into a different field,” she said. “It’s really come 180 degrees. Now it’s primarily a woman’s profession; before, it was much the opposite.”

Dr. Lessinger received her undergraduate degree in psychology, thinking she could get into the field of animal behavior. However, when she travelled to North Carolina to pursue a clinical psychology program, she realized it wasn’t really what she wanted to do.

“I was thinking about things and said, wait a minute, this is really stupid. I’m going to end up at a cocktail party somewhere and someone’s going to say, ‘What do you do?’ And I’ll say, ‘I’m a clinical psychologist but I always wanted to be a veterinarian,’ so I thought I should at least give this a try.”

She started by volunteering at a local veterinarian’s office. Eventually, she was accepted into the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Veterinary Medicine. After practicing veterinary medicine in New York City for a few years Dr. Lessinger moved to Williamsburg in 1983

kind of anonymous. But here, being part of the community, I have many of the same clients that I had in ’83. I’ve seen their kids grow up, and I’m taking care of their grandkids now and their pets, and that’s just a very special thing. It’s a real privilege.”

My value, I hope, is to make their lives more comfortable, more meaningful and happier just by teaching people what animals need. It’s a two-way street. They give so much. We need to give back to them.

**- Dr. Meryl Lessinger**

and she’s been here ever since.

Dr. Lessinger said she’s enjoyed being able to see many of her animal patients throughout their life cycle: from the time when they are just kittens or puppies through their final years.

“I think that’s what I like so much about Williamsburg,” she said. “In New York, I was

Dr. Lessinger works with a variety of animals and their owners on a daily basis, offering everything from preventative medicine and surgery to rehabilitation and pain management treatments. She is the primary surgeon at the clinic and one of only a few certified canine rehabilitation therapists. She is also certified in acupuncture.



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Dr. Lessinger's interest in acupuncture actually began when she did a paper on it as a third-year veterinary student in the 1970s. However, she didn't start practicing it until many years later.

"We are seeing animals live longer and longer so we are starting to see the degenerative changes and more old-age related problems, a lot of which are pain-related," she said. "So we're seeing more and more animals on medications and unfortunately we're also seeing more medication side effects, so my foray back into acupuncture was to try to minimize drug-related problems."

Though Dr. Lessinger said that there's still a need for drugs in many cases, she hopes to increase the quality of life for animals by offering a possible alternative for pain relief that comes with no side effects. It's a treatment that people are becoming more and more open to.

"Initially, most people looked at me like I had two heads," said Dr. Lessinger. "But when I am talking about pain relief, that's one of the modalities. What I'll do is present options to people. I'll go with what has the fewest side effects first and then work up to the stronger

and stronger medications, which unfortunately have the downside of the side effects. Especially if we're dealing with animals that are dealing with other issues ... or just can't stomach some of the medications, acupuncture is a very viable option. Or an adjunct – something to be used in addition to try to minimize the need for the other medications."

Dr. Lessinger said that she loves the variety that her job offers.

"That's what's fascinating about veterinary medicine: you can go from something as old as 6,000-year-old acupuncture to stem cell work," she said.

Though she loves the mystery that the medical side of her work offers, she also sees herself as an educator and advocate for animals. "We mostly try to educate people about what's going on with their pets so that they can make logical choices based on their needs," the veterinarian said.

Often, people talk to her about what they perceive as behavioral problems with their pets. "Problem behaviors aren't usually abnormal behaviors," she said. "They are just animals doing the natural things that animals do, but

now have to modify those behaviors to better assimilate into a home with people."

She added, "People don't understand what's going on with their pet and may not know what the pet needs, so we're the voice for the animals."

Dr. Lessinger and her husband own four cats, two dogs, three horses and a bird. She said she sees animals as partners.

"They bring so much to us, so much more depth to the whole life experience. When you don't have them, there's a void," she said. And with several decades of service to animals and their owners, Dr. Lessinger hopes that she has been able to give a little something back to them.

"My value, I hope, is to make their lives more comfortable, more meaningful and happier just by teaching people what animals need," she says. "It's a two-way street. They give so much. We need to give back to them." NDN

*To find out more about Dr. Dr. Lessinger's approach to pain relief for pets email: [mlessinger@animalclinicandwellness.com](mailto:mlessinger@animalclinicandwellness.com).*

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# A Cat's Best Friend

**BRENDA DULSKI**  
PAWSITIVELY PRECIOUS ADOPTIONS

By Brandy Centolanza

Brenda Dulski adores cats so much that she has devoted her life's work to finding homes for as many of them as she can. To help accomplish this she co-founded Pawsitively Precious Adoptions, Inc., a non-profit organization.

Her love for felines stems from her childhood in Michigan. "We always had cats around when I was growing up," Brenda recalls. "I can remember when I was about four years old, and we had a cat that was pregnant. I wanted her to have her kittens in my bed, and whenever she would run and hide, I would find her and pick her up and bring her to my room. Eventually, she did end up having the kittens in my bed."

Since then, cats have always been a part of her life.

"A lot of people don't like cats because of their independence, but that is what I really enjoy about them," Brenda says. "I like their self-confidence. They tend to have an equal relationship with people. People have to build relationships with cats, and I like to think that



deepened while stationed in Germany during a stint in the Army. She and her husband, John, began rescuing cats abandoned by military families, and with help

that process is just as rewarding for the cats as it is for the people."

In addition to a passion for cats, Brenda, along with her father and mother, Arthur and Betty, shares a desire to reach out and help others.

"My parents always taught me that if you see an injustice, then you have a responsibility to help try to fix it," Brenda states. "They've really instilled some special values in me, and I am grateful for it everyday."

Brenda's affection for and need to aid cats

from others had them spayed or neutered.

"I've always said that cats in need have found me," Brenda says.

Brenda and her husband moved to Williamsburg in 2002. She was immediately drawn to helping cats once again after finding two kittens in the parking lot of a Burger King during a cold rainstorm. She brought the four-month-old cats home and named one, a gray and white kitten, Shadow, and the other, Autumn, because of the colors of her coat.

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“She was the most beautiful tortie I’ve ever seen, and as wild as wild can be,” Brenda says. “Her fur had all the colors of the fall leaves. She was absolutely beautiful.” These two cats remain a part of her family to this day.

Eventually, Brenda began networking with local animal rescue groups, who gave her pointers in Trapping-Neutering-Return (TNR), a humane method of rescuing stray and feral cats. The process involves baiting a trap with food for the animals, taking them to be spayed or neutered in order to prevent future births of homeless kittens, then either finding homes for the cats or placing them back in their environment once they are healthy again.

“It is a really hard life for an outside cat that is not fixed,” notes Brenda, who works closely with PETA’s Spay and Neuter Immediately Please (SNIP) program, which provides a mobile van that travels throughout Hampton Roads to provide free or low-cost sterilization of cats.

In 2004, Brenda partnered with Chris Carden, a kitten rescuer from New Kent, to form Pawsitively Precious. She inherited the

organization after Chris moved to Idaho two years later, and currently operates from her home.

Brenda has multiple cats as pets, and houses several more as they wait for adoption. She begins and ends each day with cleaning litter boxes, feeding all the animals, and administering medications to any cats that may need them. In between, she scrubs and cleans cages and litter boxes, fields calls about trapping or sterilization, runs cats to and from vets or the SNIP van for appointments and surgeries, and helps the cats recuperate until they can be adopted.

Pawsitively Precious works with the national online organization [www.petfinder.com](http://www.petfinder.com) as well as Petco and PetSmart to find homes for the cats. Last year, more than 200 cats were readied for adoption. College students, volunteers from other shelters, and others assist Brenda with her effort.

“It’s been a wonderful experience for us,” Brenda says. “They are all here because of their love for these animals. I am very blessed by the dedication of our volunteers.”

Brenda stresses that her goals through Pawsitively Precious are to prevent as many kittens from being born as possible, and to create healthy cat colonies for stray and feral cats.

To that end, any money raised from annual fundraisers through Petco and PetSmart, as well as donations from other people or organizations, is strictly used for the care of cats. Pawsitively Precious will work to provide free or low-cost sterilization of cats for families who can not afford the procedure.


“If you have a need, then let’s get your cat fixed,” Brenda says. “I will spay and neuter every day as long as I have money in the bank.” Cats come and go daily from Brenda’s life, but she can’t help becoming attached to every one of them.

“No matter what, I will love them forever,” she says with misty eyes. NDN

*Pawsitively Precious is dedicated to spaying and neutering feral cats and assisting with their adoption. For more information call (757) 814-0018 and leave your name and telephone number, or email: [brenda.catspay@gmail.com](mailto:brenda.catspay@gmail.com).*

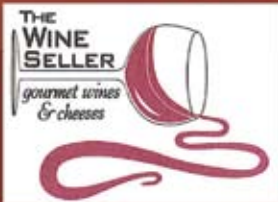
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