

SPEECH FOR CAT WRITERS ASSOCIATION

November 23, 2003

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. I am pleased to be able to talk to you tonight about the Winn Feline Foundation, a unique international organization dedicated solely to the health and well-being of all cats.

How many of you know about the Winn Foundation?

Well those of you who know about us can take a break while I talk to those of you who do not know much about us.

The Winn Feline Foundation was founded in 1968 by the Cat Fanciers' Association. It was a way of giving back to the cats and their health. Originally named the Cat Fancier's Research Foundation, the name was changed subsequently to honor the original donor to the Foundation, Robert H. Winn. In the 1990's we renamed the Foundation the Winn Feline Foundation because we thought that the name was more descriptive and would help us to reach additional donors.

Although the Foundation was initiated in 1968, our first grant was not able to be awarded until 1972, when the Foundation gave a small grant to the University of California (Davis) to help re-establish a colony of cats which had been devastated by an outbreak of FIP. To date, the Foundation has awarded grants totaling over \$2,000,000. These grants are limited to \$15,000 with the possibility of renewal. Because of the limited funds, we get primarily pilot studies and parts of larger studies. These grants allow researchers to begin programs that may go on to larger more prestigious grants.

Each year, when the protocol review program is complete, the Foundation uses as many donations as possible to fund worthy grants.

In 1985, the Foundation found itself in the wonderful position of having funds in excess of worthy grants to be awarded. We decided to establish an Endowment Fund. Our intent was to provide a place in which estates or large gifts could be protected and invested. Interest income from this fund would be used for research and special projects. Today, the Endowment Fund totals a little more than \$1 million dollars.

The Foundation has funded an average of 10 grants per year during its 35 years. Some years we are able to fund more studies, and some years less. However, we are pleased that we have funded studies in every major therapeutic area, and some of these studies have been milestones.

We know now that a key to controlling feral cat populations is through early spay/neuter programs in local shelters. Winn was asked to participate in a large study in which scientists looked at the possibility of early spay/neuter as a safe option for cats. Breeders have adopted the early spay/neuter programs, and pedigreed kittens purchased as pets are often altered prior to going to their new homes.

Diet has been an ongoing issue for cat populations, be they breeding cats or house pets.

A young researcher, Dr. Paul Pion, came to Winn with a proposal in the 1980's to look at cats dying of dilative cardiomyopathy in numbers larger than had been seen in the past. With a Winn grant, Dr. Pion discovered that these cats were dying because an essential amino acid had been removed from commercial diets. Within 6 months the problem was solved and pet foods had the amino acid again.

Winn has funded other studies designed to improve the diet of all cats. These studies focus on components of diet as well as overall dietary needs of the cat. For many years, researchers have told us that “mouse in a can” would be the ideal diet for the cat. Most recent work funded by Winn has led researchers to prove that this type of diet is the healthiest (though not the most cost effective). Winn grants funded this research.

Obesity and related health issues, such as Diabetes, are a growing concern for pet owners. Winn is funding studies in this area to aid in dietary planning for the cat.

Winn funded studies have led to blood typing tests, surgical interventions, and ways to improve neonatal health. A researcher from the University of Pennsylvania came to Winn with the idea that there are different blood types in the cat and that these blood types were why breeders saw neonatal deaths. Winn funded several studies to identify those blood types, determine the incidence and severity in both pedigreed cats and the general cat population, and determine how to work with affected kittens in breeding programs. Now, there are kits available to breeders to blood type kittens at birth, so these issues are containable. In addition, work is progressing on artificial blood donations for cats so that, if there is a need for blood donation, there is no issue of blood type.

Winn has done studies in cancer interventions, anesthetics, fracture repair, how to give pills to cats safely, flea prevention, as well as the major areas of interest, FeLV, FIP, FIV, and other life-threatening diseases. Winn has funded studies to determine the cause of vaccine associated tumors and effective treatments

Winn has funded studies and co-sponsored international conferences to identify and control FIP. FIP has been researched for more than 30 years. We know more about what FIP is not, than what it is. In the last decade, with the advent of genetic testing and the mapping of individual genes, we are learning more every day. Winn made the commitment to study FIP early in its existence and has continued to this day. We have funded studies since 1972, and we have co-sponsored the two international conferences (one in California, and one in Scotland last year) to bring scientists from all over the world together to talk about their FIP research and determine the next steps for study.

Winn has participated in mapping the feline genome and is funding studies designed to identify genes responsible for specific abnormalities. We funded two of the first studies in gene research on the cat, one on cleft palate and one on renal amyloidosis in the Abyssinian cat. Since then, we have looked at issues with inbreeding problems in specific breeds, as well as deficiencies in specific breeds.

In memory of his Devon Rex, Ricky, Winn helped Steve Dale to set up a fund to research hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. Today, over \$30,000 has been donated to The Ricky Fund and two major studies have been funded. Steve has also helped us to get our message out to the public through his weekly radio broadcast and his newspaper column.

Twelve years ago, Winn was asked to participate in the distribution of a California-based multi-million dollar trust for cat health. For 10 years, the funds were donated to one organization. Two years ago, the trust officers decided that the funds would be distributed each year through several organizations dedicated to cat health, including the Winn Foundation. We are pleased that we have been able to donate \$150,000 during the past two years. We chose interventions (reproductive and therapeutic) in multi-cat environments as our research topic because this topic covers feral cat, shelter and breeder environments.

Winn communicates and educates several ways:

- We host a feline health seminar annually where researchers involved in current health issues present their studies and results.

- We fund and participate in international feline health conferences
- Through our web site, printed material and CDs, Winn publishes on various health topics.
- Winn has established a program that encourages veterinarians to make a donation in memory of a client's deceased cat.
- We have recently added to our website a Virtual Memorial Program which allows a person who donates \$100 or more to have their cat's information on the website with a picture.
- We have established a Planned Giving Program which allows someone interested in us to support the Winn Foundation through fully tax deductible gifts.
- We are currently working on an estate planning program which will assist individuals to support the foundation in their will.

Veterinarians throughout the US and those who read US publications know us. The Cat Fancy knows us. In order to grow, we need to have others in the public sector who love cats know about us.

Our plans for the next few years include:

- Growing the endowment fund through estate planning
- Increasing awareness in the public sector to stimulate donations and general public estate planning
- Increasing awareness abroad among veterinarians and public
- Continuing to stimulate new research both in the US and abroad

What can Winn do for you, the Cat Writers?

I have spent some time telling you about us and our history. But what can we do for you?

- We can assist with background materials for your articles. We have sources and knowledge about who is doing what research and who is interested in new areas of research.
- We can assist with finding vet experts in therapeutic areas
- We are a source of information about cats and their health. (both pedigreed and non-pedigreed). Our CFA breeders have first-hand knowledge of cats and their issues. The CFA Board and its breeders are available for interviews through Michael Brim and his public relations staff.

What you can do for Winn?

- Winn needs exposure in the private sector. We are known by veterinarians, and by the Cat Fancy in general. But we are not known in the private sector. We are beginning to host "get to know us" parties around the US, but we need more.
- We need you to write about Winn in your columns, mention Winn on your radio and TV shows, use us as a resource and mention that studies you write about are Winn-funded studies

Together, we can get more people interested and involved in the health and well-being of their cats.

Before I leave you tonight, I want to mention three people who have been instrumental in working with the Foundation over the years:

Joan Miller - Joan was on the Board of the Winn Foundation and its President for twenty years. She left our Board in 1997 to do other work with the Cat Fanciers association. However, without her, the Foundation could not have grown to the stature that it is today.

Michael Brim – Michael has served as our Public Relations director for many years and we continue to know him as a strong and valued voice for us.

Karen Lawrence – I know many of you know her as your web master. She designed and implemented our website and continues to have wonderful ideas about how to get us into the public sector

Thank you.