

## **Jeff Bazell & Jeff Kestner of St Johns Brussels Griffons, Reg'd., named AKC Toy Group Breeders of the Year**

Jeff Bazell was born in southern Ohio and is the youngest of a big family of all boys. Jeff Kestner grew up in northeast Ohio in the middle of a family of four kids.

While Kestner is a first-generation dog enthusiast, both sides of Bazell's family had pure bred dogs for many years. His maternal grandfather was a farrier and blacksmith and fed a family of 14 children on wild game and produce that he "truck farmed" with draft horses. He also bred AKC registered Black and Tan Coonhounds which he hunted coon with, and 2 Airedales that were his groundhog dogs. Grandpa Coffman first used the St Johns kennel name as the family homestead was along St Johns Creek. The kennel name was first registered with the AKC in 1930.

His paternal grandmother bred many Chow Chows starting in 1934 and these dogs were behind many of Dr Draper's famous Chow Chow champions. She was a Methodist minister and could not attend dog shows due to preaching on weekends. She did attend the Chow Chow Club national specialty on several occasions and was presented a devoted service medal from the parent club for her efforts in promoting new memberships. Bazell still has, and will be wearing, the medal when he judges at the AKC National Championship presented by Royal Canin Dog Show in Orlando and where the AKC Toy Group Breeders of the Year award will be presented.

Griffons came into Bazell's life because as a boy, he always had a huge interest in cartooning and cartoons. He read them faithfully and when he was 10 years old Griffons were featured in the Dick Tracy cartoon strip for several weeks. The dog had been stolen and was reported to be "the World's Most Expensive Dog." Well, of course this intrigued a young boy so he wanted to know more since he was already interested in dogs and had finished the championship on a Pekingese the year before at the national specialty. He wrote to Nigel Aubrey-Jones in Canada who advertised in the classifieds of Dog World Magazine in the 1970's. They corresponded for a long time and finally Aubrey-Jones said he would sell a puppy at the price listed in the Dick Tracy strip, "...maybe a thousand bucks." At the time people thought it was horrible to treat a kid that way, but Jeff worked hard and saved money for almost 3 years before reaching the goal. When Nigel Aubrey-Jones passed he left Bazell all of his rare Griffon books and artwork worth many times the price of that first puppy. He included a note that said, "You always said you'd make Griffons competitive and you have, young man. I am so proud of you."

The Jeffs met in January, 2004, and were married in January, 2016.

Jeff Kestner taught elementary school for 13 years after college graduation. Always active in the local teachers' union, in 1996 he accepted a job as a Labor Relations Consultant for the Ohio

Education Association. He provides representation services to nearly 1,000 public school employees in northcentral Ohio. Along with expertise in collective bargaining and member representation, he also is certified as an Organizational Development and Systems Change specialist. He frequently provides training throughout the statewide organization on cultural competency and facilitation skills. OEA is the largest public employee union in Ohio, and is affiliated with the National Education Association.

The Jeffs own a large floral and greenhouse operation called Flowers of the Good Earth. Bazell has operated the business since 1979. He has won 129 International Design Awards of Excellence for his garden and floral design work at the Floriade in the Netherlands, the Ameriflora, the Chelsea Flower Show and the Cincinnati Flower Show. He has also taught design and dendrology at the university level at both Ohio University and Ohio State University.

Bazell's first Griffon was St Aubrey My Man Friday "Manly" from Nigel Aubrey-Jones. He was primarily Gaystock bred from Diana Gaines, Tessa's mother. He finished his championship here in the states. He was shown a few times in Canada but there were none in competition there at the time. Bazell had three different Griffons before he was fortunate that Laurie Mahood of Kelim Griffons in Canada took an interest and sold him his first two breeding worthy bitches in 1978 and 1979. They were of primarily Starbeck old "C" bitch tail line breeding. Jacque Jones allowed Bazell to use two different stud dogs including her black and tan English import CH Dundry Mr Midshipman. Davey, as he was called, was straight Chosendale family tail line bred by Desmond Gregory who became a good friend and breed mentor. The other sires used of Jacque's breeding were the red rough BIS CH Treyacre's Inque and his smooth brother that was Pat Dresser's pet Charles, CH Treyacre's Dress Circle Ingot.

The first Griffon who loved Jeff Kestner was CH Doveland Stellaby Starlight, "Stella." He finished Stella in 3 weekends of shows his first times in the ring. Her son, GCH St Johns Your Name In Lights, "Ivan," was his first Bred-By AKC Champion. He was one of the first Grand Champion Brussels Griffons and sired over 25 champions. He was an ABGA Specialty Winner; his progeny are still well-represented in the show ring.

Kestner and Bazell continue to work with Evelyn Hole, Homestead Kennels, in breeding and conformation. Each of them brings their own expertise to the success of St Johns. Bazell knows the traits of each generation of Griffons to help determine appropriate breedings. Kestner maintains all breeding records, coordinates all health testing and veterinary care and pedigrees, which is invaluable when selecting breeding pairs. Evelyn Hole is an expert in canine husbandry and supervises all matings and the whelping and rearing of puppies.

The Jeffs were very honored and humbled when they learned of their nomination to this prestigious award, a first for the breed.