

# Creatures Great & Small

*The veterinarians at Lane Animal Hospital have been caring for local livestock and pets for three generations.*



by Debbie Eisenberg Merion

A large, brown, curly-haired Airedale sits in the driver's seat of the minivan parked in front of Chelsea's Lane Animal Hospital on North Main. One minute the dog is looking dapper and in control, his nose sticking out over the dashboard. The next minute he is suddenly submissive, padding into the lobby on the end of his owner's leash.

Oblivious to the surgery scheduled for him today, Jasper the Airedale prances past an ancient class photo of the very first Dr. Lane in the family, who graduated from veterinary school way back in 1901. As Jasper is led to a clean cage in the back room, he trots within sniffing distance of the fourth Dr. Lane—"Dr. Jonathan," as the receptionists call him, to distinguish him from the fifth Dr. Lane, Jonathan's wife, Margaret. The couple are both friendly, attractive, and in their

early thirties, but they are physical opposites: he's a big guy with a round face, glasses, and fluffy fair hair; she's petite, with a smooth black ponytail.

Dr. Jonathan, holding a test tube for a blood test, motions to the pharmacy in the corner—some white shelves lined with little boxes. "Ninety percent of the medicines we stock are also used on humans," he explains. "In fact, when my daughter was sick, her doctor prescribed amoxicillin. I just took it here off my shelf" (he points to a small box). "I would have gotten the same thing from a pharmacy."

He walks through a door into a tiny operating room. Pet owners are not allowed in here, and one heart-wrenching glance makes it clear why. A seventy-pound chocolate-brown Lab named Duke looks terribly vulnerable lying on his back on one of the two stainless steel operating tables squeezed into the room. The dog is breathing anesthetic through a plastic tube with his eyes closed. His tongue hangs out, and his paws are held over his head. The only thing covering his exposed body is a blue sheet of paper cloth the size of a dinner napkin with a hole cut discreetly in the center. Duke's scrotum and testicles emerge through the hole like two tiny tan kiwifruits.

"Dr. Margaret" is scrubbed to operate on Duke. Wearing latex gloves and a white lab jacket, she looks youthful, beautifully confi-

dent, and professional against a backdrop of well-worn cabinets that would look at home on *Marcus Welby, M.D.* Wielding her scalpel precisely, she requires less than half an hour to relieve Duke of his testicles, deftly plucking them out through a small incision as if she were twisting lemons off a tree. She then clamps and cuts the sperm ducts and sews Duke back up with a curved needle.

Ten minutes later, she's compassionately stroking the top of Duke's head as he comes out of anesthesia. Jonathan then does the muscle work—scooping up the drowsy dog in his outstretched arms like a sleeping child and gently laying Duke in his recovery cage in the back room.

Duke will lie there and be groggy for a while and maybe even dream about his party-animal days, now firmly in the past. Margaret explains that she believes this operation is a wonderful service to the dog (Duke won't be at risk for testicular or prostate cancer), to his owners (he won't have the urge to roam), and to the entire Chelsea community (he won't be adding any unwanted puppies to an area that already has too many stray dogs).

The tiny office feels busy but not stressed. Even in the midst of operating, no one rushes about, raises a voice, or is anything but casually polite as the staff scoot aside to make room for each other in the close quarters. The system is deliberately informal. Any vet who wants to do a surgery, Jonathan explains, can just grab a chart—he waves an example, a white four-by-six card—and get started. Unlike many other veterinary offices, the Lane hospital has no veterinary assistants to help with procedures, partly because space is so tight. Instead, the vets act as each other's gofers, helping one another complete op-

erations with the practiced, fluid ease of a pair of jugglers.

Duke's now surplus parts, like everything removed in surgery, will be examined and then disposed of as medical waste—unless a problem is found, in which case they will be sent off for laboratory analysis. Occasionally, though, the vets keep a surgical souvenir. When Boy Scout or Brownie troops visit, the kids are always riveted by the strange specimens the doctors have assembled over the years—glass jars that hold a dog's heart riddled by heartworm (used to emphasize the importance of giving your dog heartworm pills), a lamb with one eye, the two heads of a stillborn deformed calf.

Like a boy at show-and-tell, Jonathan gleefully hands me another specimen—a Folger's jar filled with a dozen smooth white angular stones, some the size of golf balls, that clink against the glass. They're bladder stones, all removed from a single dog. They were pieced together in there like a jigsaw puzzle, he explains. "And that wasn't all of them," he adds. "The owner took the largest one home as a paperweight."

Jonathan Lane didn't always want to be a veterinarian, though he grew up helping his father, who was also a vet. Every night at dinner, he'd hear the highlights of his dad's day with animals and their owners. "My father didn't romanticize it. He'd tell us the good things and the bad points—the hours, the difficult people to work with. I thought I might be a medical doctor in college, but somewhere between sophomore and junior year I thought I wanted to become a veterinarian." ♦

Jonathan met Margaret while they were



(Left) Dr. Jonathan Lane with Norman, his deaf dog. (Top) Dr. Art Tremper makes a farm call.

PHOTOS J. ADRIAN WYLIE

Animal Hospital *continued*



Theodore Lane



C. C. Lane



Donna Lane



Wilfred Lane



Margaret Lane



Jonathan Lane

***Three generations of the Lane family: (Top) brothers Theodore and C. C. Lane were vets in Ann Arbor and Chelsea, respectively, early in the 1900s. (Center) Donna and Wilfred Lane built the present Lane Animal Hospital in the 1960s. (Bottom) Husband-and-wife vets Jonathan and Margaret Lane joined the practice in the 1990s.***

both hitting the books in vet school on the Caribbean island of St. Kitts. Mutual friends introduced them; on their first lunch date, they found so much to talk about that they missed half their afternoon classes. Now they live in a drafty 1940s log cabin on North Lake with their two-year-old twin daughters, Margaret Mary and Caroline Anne; their dog, Norman, a blue Australian cattle dog (a cross between a collie and a dingo); and their cat, Manchester, named after the town where she was found as a stray four years ago.

Jonathan adopted Norman during his last year of veterinary school. Tests had

determined that the puppy was deaf, but Jonathan couldn't bear to see him destroyed. "Norman has learned hand signals, so he can sit, stay, and shake, and he's really good with my family, but he's almost too excitable," Jonathan says. "I wouldn't call him socially retarded, but that's what my wife calls him. So I have a behaviorally challenged deaf dog, but he's a good guy."

When Margaret started working at Lane Animal Hospital in January 1996, she was the first woman veterinarian in the venerable, male-dominated practice. In addition to her husband, the men included

C. C., THEODORE, AND WILFRED LANE PHOTOS COURTESY DONNA LANE; DONNA, JONATHAN, AND MARGARET LANE PHOTOS BY J. ADRIAN WYLIE

her father-in-law, Dr. Wilfred Chandler Lane (the third Dr. Lane, with whom she worked for just six months before his death in July 1996), and two vets who joined the practice in the late 1960s, Dr. Art Tremper, fifty-six, and Dr. Robert Bowers, fifty-three.

Two turn-of-the century ancestors round out the list of Lane veterinarians: Dr. Wilfred's father, Dr. C. C. Lane; and C. C. Lane's brother, Dr. Theodore Lane, the very first veterinarian in the Lane family, whose 1901 vet school graduation photo hangs in the hospital lobby.

Art Tremper's face is the one that farm animals usually squint at when they're in pain or giving birth. Rugged and lined, it bears witness to his years spent outdoors in the punishing sun, wind, and cold. Tall and lean, intense and slightly reticent, Tremper wraps his lanky frame into an armless office chair and quietly scans a thick veterinary book while others bustle around him in the tiny wood-paneled office.

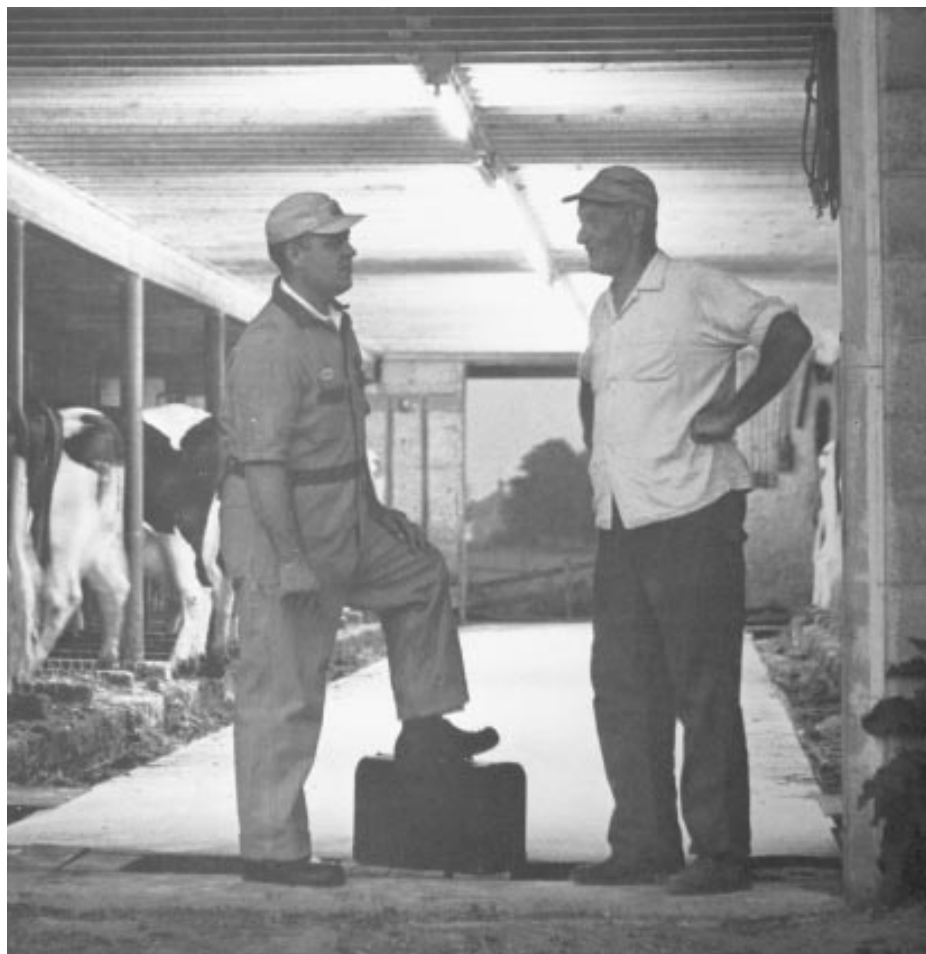
Bob Bowers is shorter than Tremper, and although his hair is grayer, it's combed forward in a more stylish cut, giving him a younger look. "I like the eyes and rear ends," Bowers tells me—talking, of course, about his surgical specialties. Right now he is examining Samantha, a light gray barn cat with orange eyes, who is sneezing from a chronic upper respiratory condition. After prescribing medication, he gently pulls Samantha out of her open cage to show her owner, Dawn Wicker, the trick to getting a cat to swallow a pill.

Tremper and Bowers are the hospital's most experienced vets. But in many ways, the true senior member of the practice is Donna Lane, Jonathan's mother, who keeps an eye on everything as office manager. Short and round, with a freshly washed face and wavy hair that hasn't been fussed over, Mrs. Lane, sixty-six, has a twinkle in her eye, an incredible memory, and a wise aura that makes her seem like Mrs. Santa Claus. She lives right next door to the animal hospital in a neat stone ranch home. This afternoon she pops out of her front door and waves a visitor inside, past her grandchildren's red and blue plastic tricycles on the front porch.

"I want to tell you about Dr. Lane," she says, pointing to a black-and-white photo on her kitchen table. The photo shows a man standing next to a horse and buggy, and it launches Donna into the story of how the Lane Veterinary Hospital was started almost a century ago.

The guy in the picture, wearing a suit, ankle-high shoes, a bow tie, and a straw hat, is C. C. Lane—her father-in-law, Dr. Chandler Charles Lane. He graduated from the Grand Rapids Veterinary College in 1905, a fact she can state precisely because she has his commencement announcement—slightly yellow and ripped—sitting on her antique oak kitchen table right next to the photo. She's dug out this paper for the first time just the day before, and when she saw that date, she was as shocked as a historian would be on finding proof that the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1777. The family knew C. C. had moved to Chelsea upon graduation

Animal Hospital *continued*



*Wilfred Lane (right) talks with a local farmer, ca. 1960. Back then, farm animals accounted for 65 percent of the Lanes' practice. Today they're down to just 10 percent.*

from vet school, but up until that day, they had thought that the year had been 1911, not 1905. They'd even used the 1911 date in their Yellow Pages ad and on the polo shirts that the veterinarians wear under their wraparound gowns.

C. C. had hoped to get a leg up into his first job from his big brother Theodore, who was a veterinarian in Ann Arbor. But Theodore couldn't scrape together enough work for C. C., so the younger brother did what many jobless college graduates still do: he headed home to his parents. Luck was with him, though, as he took the train from Ann Arbor to Chelsea and then rented a horse at Charlie Martin's livery stable on Park Street to ride home to Unadilla. Martin was looking for someone to help him take care of his horses. When Martin heard that C. C. was an unemployed veterinarian, he offered him a job on the spot—and a home in the basement of the stable. And so the Lanes got their start in Chelsea in 1905.

In C. C.'s day, veterinarians were a male lot, but the tide is turning. Women now make up 33 percent of all practicing veterinarians and 70 percent of the most recent veterinary graduates. "At first my father didn't want to hire a female vet," reveals Jonathan.

In fact, Donna Lane says, farmers calling her husband were sometimes too embarrassed even to leave a message with her about why they were calling. "The farmer wouldn't say, 'I have a cow that needs to be cleaned' [referring to the removal of a placenta after calving], or 'I have a cow that needs a teat opened,'" she remembers. "They'd just say, 'Send your husband

over.'" The farmers were forced to change when Wilfred himself changed and welcomed Jonathan's wife, Margaret, as a colleague. "When people would call and ask for Dr. Lane," Jonathan recalls, "he'd say, 'Which one do you want—the old one, the young one, or the pretty one?'"

Today Chelsea supports two veterinary practices. But during the Great Depression, C. C. Lane was the only vet in town—and a struggling one at that. "Sometimes they would be paid with two chickens in a sack," Donna says. C. C. and his wife, Caroline, bought and sold real estate as a sideline while raising Wilfred and his brother, Charles, who became a school principal in Chelsea. After buying and selling a number of homes, they settled in a white clapboard house that you can see from Donna Lane's living-room window, on the other side of the veterinary hospital. There C. C. and Caroline worked together—until C. C.'s death brought their partnership to a sudden end.

"I can remember the day he [C. C. Lane] was killed," says Donna. It was 1943, and she was just ten years old when the news reached the Noah family farm in Unadilla. "I remember my aunt calling my mother, and my mother said, 'What are we going to do now?'" Dr. Lane was the Noah family's veterinarian, and his sudden death in a car accident while coming back from a farm call was a blow not just to his own loved ones, but to all animal owners in the area.

Wilfred Lane was in Europe fighting World War II when his dad was killed. When he came back from the war, he decided to go to college to become a veterinarian as well. By the time he put out his shingle in Chelsea in 1953, ten years after his father's death, another doctor had tak-



## Animal Hospital *continued*

en his dad's place, but Caroline Lane still bathed, groomed, and boarded animals for her livelihood.

Wilfred opened his own practice in partnership with his mother. He had a truckload of stone delivered from a local quarry for \$35, and in 1954 he built a combined home and office for himself and his mother—the same house where Donna lives now. When Caroline Lane came down with cancer in 1960, Donna was the kind registered nurse who came to help take care of her. Wilfred was smitten, and one year later he had lost a mother but gained a wife, housemate, and veterinary office manager. Even now, the veterinary office phone rings constantly in Donna's kitchen. When I ask about it, she says, "Did the phone ring? I don't even hear it, not unless it rings too long—then I pick it up."

When Donna was a farm girl growing up in Unadilla, the sight of C. C. Lane's black Model T Ford kicked up a lot of dust and excitement. These days, the practice's farm vehicle is a dark red 1999 Eddie Bauer Ford Explorer that waits at the ready in Donna's garage.

The Explorer's backseat and cargo areas are filled with black leather cases loaded with supplies, and a locked white cabinet the size of a dishwasher. Specially made for veterinarians' vehicles, the cabinet is filled with jars of medication and drawers of stainless steel tools.

Some sheep infected with pinkeye are bleating for help this January afternoon, and Tremper drives out in the Explorer to take the call. Golden hay covers the floor of his woolly patients' modern barn on a small farm north of Ann Arbor. The temperature is a toe-numbing fifteen degrees, and little white frigid puffs form near the ewes' noses every time they breathe out. Dressed in high black rubber boots, heavy turquoise overalls, and a thick blue nylon jacket with frayed elastic cotton cuffs, Tremper doesn't seem bothered by the cold—in fact, he seems much happier than he did back at the office, grinning or laughing with a shake of his head after most of his sentences.

Tremper and farmer Linda Koepfel are standing next to a small blue tractor, discussing treatment options. Koepfel has already tried to treat her flock herself with phone assistance from Tremper and over-the-counter antibiotics, but wasn't successful. Tremper thinks now that the best way to get rid of the infection, once and for all, is to treat the entire herd of thirty-five sheep with an injection of an antibiotic named gentamicin. Koepfel agrees, on the condition that "it won't hurt my pregnant ewes at all. That's my concern."

Docile a moment before, the sheep begin darting around the crowded pen as soon as the injections begin. Koepfel catches them one by one, holding each in a gentle headlock while Tremper pulls off the white plastic needle cover and presses the syringe into a sheep's rear leg through

a thick layer of white or black wool. After each shot, Tremper and Koepfel work together to herd the sheep through a wooden gate into the "done" pen.

When all the sheep are treated, Koepfel wets a white washcloth and carefully wipes the discharge out of a dark sheep's infected eyes. When the 150-pound ewe

*With livestock prices falling, it's not surprising that farmers are fast becoming do-it-yourselfers. "Vets are more in a consulting role now [rather] than doing actual work," Art Tremper explains.*

doesn't pull away, Tremper seems impressed. "Most sheep wouldn't let their owners do that," he proudly explains. Before the vet leaves, Koepfel asks him to check a watery eye in her white fluffy Great Pyrenees dog, Kate, who guards the sheep. She tells me she appreciates the attentiveness of Tremper and his colleagues: "They don't make you feel like you're rushed."

A basic farm call is \$35, but this visit will end up costing the Koepfels \$165 once all the injections are added up. With livestock prices falling, it's not surprising that farmers are fast becoming do-it-yourselfers. "Vets are more in a consulting role now [rather] than doing actual work," Tremper explains.

"I understand [farmers'] doing anything they can do to save a penny," he adds. "I would do it in the same situation—and for the most part we're busy enough anyway."

Part of the reason they're busy today is that Wilfred and Donna Lane realized in 1964 what they'd have to do to survive: rely less on farm animals and more on pets. "That year we helped sixteen farms in Dexter and Chelsea sell off all of their animals," Donna says. "We sat down and said, 'We've got to do something different.'" So in 1966, the better to accommodate pet owners, Donna and her husband built the first stage of the present Lane Animal Hospital.

When the hospital opened, large farm animals still accounted for 65 percent of the practice. "This was the largest sheep-producing county east of the Mississippi when I married Dr. Lane in 1961," Donna recalls. "Every farm had forty-five or fifty cows, and my dad always had a hundred milking cows and three hundred sheep. To this day, Washtenaw County still has the most number of sheep of any other county in Michigan."

Sheep are still a frequent sight outcounty, but other livestock are growing scarce. Large animals now account for just 10 percent of the Lanes' practice. The vets handle an average of just one or two farm calls a day year round, peaking at half a

dozen calls a day during the busy spring birthing season. The Lanes' experience isn't isolated: since the 1950s, the number of farms in Michigan has fallen by half, and the total number of farm acres has been reduced by one-third.

While Lane Animal Hospital got bigger, so did Jonathan, his sister Caroline, and brothers Wilfred and David. Living next door in the stone house her husband built, Donna somehow found time to help run the business as well as raise the kids. One of her accomplishments was organizing Wilfred, a guy who spent most of his work time in barns. "My mother got my father writing things down [treatments given and medicines prescribed]," praises Jonathan. At this, Donna looks at me and proudly winks.

The home is filled with antique furniture handed down from Donna's family and her husband's family. Those ancestors' photos share space on the walls and tables with newer ones of Donna's four children, her five grandchildren, and her family's beloved standard poodle, Francie, who lived to age seventeen. "She'd stand guard and make sure people went that way [toward the veterinary hospital, not into the house]," she recalls.

Sitting in his cozy office, Jonathan opens a lower drawer of his desk, pulls out a pack of fan-folded computer printouts, and runs his finger down a column. "We had nineteen thousand patient visits last year," he says. Then, turning to Donna, he asks, "Is that right, Mom?"

She ought to know. In 1990, she computerized the practice to help with record keeping and billing. "It's always embarrassing to send a rabies reminder for a dog that we put to sleep the year before," she explains. Now she can confidently say that last year their little office had almost five times as many patient visits as Chelsea has residents, caring for approximately 1,000 large animals, 4,000 dogs, and 4,000 cats.

Chelsea's pet population has grown along with its human population, but the main reason the vets are busier than ever is that people are taking better care of their pets—bringing them in, Art Tremper notes, even for dental work. In comparison with 1983, according to American Veterinary Medical Association figures, today's average dog sees a vet 50 percent more often, and the average cat twice as often.

As they enter their second century, the Lane veterinarians are looking both forward and back. They plan to build a brand-new veterinary hospital across the street sometime next year. It'll have more space, a special procedures room for a laser or ultrasound machine, and a lobby with an exhibit of old family photos and ancient farm implements they've collected over the years.

But when the Boy Scout and Brownie troops come for tours, odds are they won't notice those things first. They'll still be captivated by the jar full of bladder stones and those other special glass jars in which floats the Lane collection of medical specimens that educate and titillate—the dog's heart threaded by heartworms, the cyclops lamb, and the two-headed calf. ■