

# Winn Feline Foundation: 40 Years and Counting

BY JOAN MILLER AND BETTY WHITE

The Winn Feline Foundation celebrated its 25th anniversary at the 1993 Cat Fanciers' Association (CFA) annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas. The joyous tone of the celebration was set by Joan Miller, then president of Winn, with a champagne toast to loyal donors and the foundation itself. Her words resonate to this day:

"An anniversary always has special meaning. For the Winn Foundation, it signifies a platform reached: We made it, we've accomplished something, we've grown, we still care, we look back and can remember, we are ready for the next step.

"The ancient symbolism associated with a tree provides a metaphor for our organization. Twenty-five years ago we started with a small seed—an idea that was put forth by Richard Gebhardt, then CFA's president. He intended to find a way to increase CFA's prominence and also enable the association to give something back to the cats. The CFA Foundation was founded in December 1968.

"The seed of an idea was then planted by Robert Winn, CFA's longtime attorney and advisor. As the first CFA Foundation president, he established our fundamental

goals and principles. His vision was to be not just another fund-raising group, but one that was different. We would limit grants only to medical studies benefiting cats. . . ." When he died in 1971, the foundation was renamed in his honor.

"Ever since, this tree has been nurtured by many people—especially Rosemonde S. Peltz, MD, who was president for six years during the early development period. All of our past and present board members have kept the foundation's principles intact. Some of the original goals have been reached. And now our trunk is strong and our roots go deep; our branches have extended and we are confident in the influence the Winn Foundation has had on improving feline veterinary medicine.

"The fullness of our tree now provides protection for all cats. There are some twists and turns in its form, and it remains flexible and bending. . . . We know it can withstand droughts and wind without breaking. The toast we offer tonight is to you—our donors, the clubs, the corporations, our medical advisors and CFA, its board and staff. Without the support of you, the individuals who believe in the Winn Foundation and know the need for its work, we could not

continue. You give us the momentum to keep striving. Your donations include not only money but time, ideas, enthusiasm, influence, responsiveness. The appreciation that is felt with every contribution received is the encouragement needed for the Winn Foundation's continuing growth and strength.

"Tonight's toast is also to the foundation itself. It has become an entity with an independent existence. It has achieved the dignity of an organization with history and the uniqueness of a special tree."

In 1968, what eventually became the Winn Feline Foundation was founded "to promote the health and welfare of cats by developing or participating in projects for their betterment, including the contribution of funds for research and education." As Winn celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2008, it is appropriate to note the important milestones reached along the way—highlights that demonstrate the foundation's coming of age as a leading advocate for improvements in feline medicine.

The Winn Feline Foundation has a sterling reputation that is well-deserved indeed. They have done so very much to further scientific investigation into feline diseases, filling a critical need for both veterinarians and cats the world over. Our hats are off to you!

—Valerie Creighton, DVM, President,  
American Association of Feline Practitioners



**1968**

The CFA Foundation is established. Charter officers are Robert H. Winn, president; Elizabeth Freret, secretary; Jean Rose, treasurer. CFA appropriates \$100 for the foundation, plus \$25 to record the charter in Washington, D.C.

**1971**

The foundation's name is changed to the Robert H. Winn Foundation to honor CFA's longtime attorney and advisor after his death.

The first grant is awarded for \$1,000 to help veterinarians at the University of California, Davis, re-establish a cat research colony that had been decimated by feline infectious peritonitis (FIP).

**1973–1979**

Rosemonde S. Peltz, MD, serves as president.

**1979**

The first Symposium on Feline Health is held in New Orleans, spearheaded by Joan Miller.

**1980–1996**

Joan Miller serves as president.

**1982**

The procedure for awarding breed-related study grants is established.

The first Kal-Kan calendar of CFA national award-winning cats (1982–1987) is produced, with proceeds benefiting Winn.

Echocardiography is developed to diagnose feline heart disease, with help from a Winn grant.

**1985**

The Winn Endowment Fund is established. The income is used to fund feline health studies, conferences and related expenses.

**1987**

A Winn-funded study proves that taurine deficiency is as a cause of dilated cardiomyopathy and manufacturers change the formulation of cat foods to correct this serious problem.

A Winn-funded researcher identifies and defines the feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV).

A grant for ongoing work on fungal infections is awarded by Winn. The research leads to better treatment and prevention strategies.

**1988**

Cats Chicago holds the first benefit cat show for Winn and donates \$20,000.



The first of five Purina/CFA Invitational Shows is held, resulting in total contributions to Winn of more than \$180,000.

Winn awards the first grant to identify the genetic mutations that cause disease.

Winn is represented at an American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) convention for the first time.

Winn-funded research leads to the development of a small cuff to measure blood pressure in cats.

**1989**

The first Endowment Fund study is awarded.

The genetics of blood groups in cats is determined, with help from a grant from Winn.

Winn awards more than \$100,000 in study grants for the first time.

**1991**

In conjunction with the AVMA, Winn funds a study investigating early-age altering of kittens, proving its safety.

Winn begins recognizing cumulative donors on the Winn Donor Tree.

**1993**

Winn reaches the milestones of \$1 million in grants awarded and \$1 million in donations received.

In conjunction with the University of California, Davis, Winn co-chairs the First International Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP) and Feline Enteric Coronavirus Workshop.

**1994**

The Robert H. Winn Foundation is renamed the Winn Feline Foundation.

**1995**

CFA donates \$13,000 to Winn from the CFA International Show, and an additional \$15,000 to defray the foundation's administrative costs.

Winn receives the largest individual donation—\$5,000 from Joanne Thompson in memory of her husband, Don Thompson.

Winn receives one of the largest club donations—\$10,000 from the Garden State Cat Club.

Winn awards the Regional Outstanding Veterinarian Award to Karen L. Hess, DVM, North Atlantic Region.

**1996–2005**

Hilary Helmrich serves as president.

**1996**

Winn sponsors the AVMA Feline Excellence in Research Award. The first recipient is Elisabeth Zenger, DVM, PhD, DACVIM.

**1997**

In conjunction with the AVMA, the second Winn Feline Foundation Excellence in Research Award is awarded to Mark Peterson, DVM, DACVIM.

Two large bequests are received from the estate of Edward Terrizzi and the estate of Joanne Thompson.

**1998**

Winn co-sponsors the First International Feline Genetic Diseases Conference at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.



The Winn Feline Foundation Excellence in Research Award goes to Mary Tompkins, DVM, PhD.

The Winn web site makes its debut: [www.WinnFelineHealth.org](http://www.WinnFelineHealth.org).

### 1999

The Winn Endowment Fund reaches the half-million-dollar mark.

Winn introduces the Veterinary Memorial Program and the Planned Giving Program, both unveiled at the CFA International Show.

A Winn-funded study by Deborah Greco, DVM, PhD, DACVIM, demonstrates the efficacy of a high-protein/low-carbohydrate diet to treat diabetic cats.

### 2000

Winn co-sponsors the Second International Feline Genetic Diseases Conference at the University of California, Davis.

### 2001

Winn surveys exhibitors at the CFA International Cat Show to determine the cat health issues that are of most concern.

Donations for Winn are received from the Friskies Roundtables for Breeders.

### 2002

Winn co-sponsors the Second International Conference on Advances in Canine and Feline Genomics in St. Louis.

Winn joins other sponsors for the Second International FIP Conference in Glasgow, Scotland.



Winn establishes the Ricky Fund for hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM) research, through the efforts and donations of

Steve and Robin Dale to memorialize their Devon Rex, Ricky.

Winn hires its first executive director.

Cumulative grant awards from Winn exceed \$2 million.

### 2003

Winn co-sponsors the Feline Genetics Extravaganza at the University of California, Davis, and the Canine and Feline Breeding and Genetics Conference at Tufts University.

Winn publishes its first newsletter, *Winn.News*.

Winn qualifies for the Combined Federal Campaign, a giving program for federal and military personnel.

Winn begins administering feline health study grants for the Miller Trust.

The CFA Siamese Breed Council donates funds for a breed-related study of feline mammary cancer.

### 2004

Winn co-sponsors the Feline Genetics Extravaganza Conference at the University of California, Davis, and the Third International Conference on Advances in Canine in Feline Genomics at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands.

Winn introduces the Estate Planning Program, which encourages cat lovers to include Winn in their wills.

Winn-sponsored research identifies a genetic mutation responsible for feline polycystic kidney disease.

The Winn Endowment Fund reaches \$1 million.

Winn initiates the Virtual Memorial Program, a section on its web site for people to memorialize their cats.

### 2005

Winn co-sponsors the Canine and Feline Breeding and Genetics Conference at Tufts University.

Winn-funded research leads to the identification of a genetic mutation causing hypertrophic cardiomyopathy in Maine Coon Cats.

Interest in breed-related studies increases.

Steve Dale is awarded the first Winn Feline Foundation Media Award for significant service to Winn and for promoting feline health.

### 2005

Susan Little, DVM, DABVP, becomes president.

Susan Gingrich and Winn establish the Bria Fund for FIP research, in memory of Susan's cat Bria.

### 2006

Donations increase by 40 percent.

Winn unveils its first official logo.

Winn co-sponsors the Fourth International Conference on Advances in Canine and Feline Genomics at the University of California, Davis.

Winn produces its first direct mail campaign to increase its donor base.

Kim C. Thornton is awarded the Winn Feline Foundation Media Award.

Grant awards exceed \$200,000 in one year for the first time.

### 2007

The Houston Cat Club is the first club to reach \$100,000 in cumulative donations to Winn and is recognized with a boulder on the Winn Donor Tree.

A Winn-funded researcher successfully identifies a genetic mutation causing hypertrophic cardiomyopathy in Ragdoll cats.

Winn-funded research identifies the mutation that causes feline blood groups.

Total Winn grants exceed \$3 million.

Winn co-sponsors the Canine and Feline Breeding and Genetics Conference at Tufts University.

Research partially funded by Winn traces the genetic history of cat breeds.

Winn remodels its web site and adds a blog, [www.WinnFelineHealth.blogspot.com](http://www.WinnFelineHealth.blogspot.com).

Winn launches the Veterinary Honor Roll Program.

Amy Shojai is awarded the Winn Feline Foundation Media Award.

### 2008

Winn celebrates its 40th anniversary in Louisville, Kentucky, and holds its 30th annual Feline Health Symposium.