



# NOVICE TO NUMBER ONE

by Linda Ayers Turner Knorr

## Ch. Storybook's Rip It Up

TOP WORKING DOG 2000



### JAKE

**TOP LEFT: MICHAEL SHEPHERD AND YOUR AUTHOR ENJOYING MEMORIES OF "JAKE'S" CAREER**

**TOP RIGHT: STORYBOOK BOXERS "STORY" AND "ANNIE" BOB AND BOW, SHOWN BY "JAKE'S" BREEDERS, SKIP AND LINDA ABEL.**

**BOTTOM LEFT: JOEL, CHERYL AND KEITH ROBBINS AT HOME ON THEIR FARM IN NEWMAN, GEORGIA.**

Eighteen years ago when I moved from Atlanta to Greenville, South Carolina, my only acquaintance was my new husband, Jim. Immediately I discovered a small row of shops about a half-mile from our home. On one corner was a dry-cleaners and the other the locally famous Northgate Soda Shop. In between there was the charming old fashioned Northgate Beauty Shop (imagine "The Steel Magnolias").

For a while I paid no attention to the only other business there. The sign painted on the window read "Cotton Brokers." Then one day my beautician, Debbie Holcombe, casually mentioned that its owner was somehow involved with dogs.

Curious, I popped my head in and met **Deas Richardson**. His office consisted mainly of one large room filled with stacks and stacks of dog magazines.

He loved to talk. I can close my eyes and hear the tone of his voice – an exaggerated Southern drawl. Turns out **Deas** was the **American Kennel Club Regional Trial Board Representative**. Soon, I learned he was a friend of my parents Roy and Hazel Ayers. Our own friendship grew from there.

On my weekly visits to the beauty salon, the dry cleaners and the soda shop, I always peeked in to visit **Deas Richardson** who made me feel so welcome in my new city. I had made a new friend with whom to ask questions and exchange dog tales.

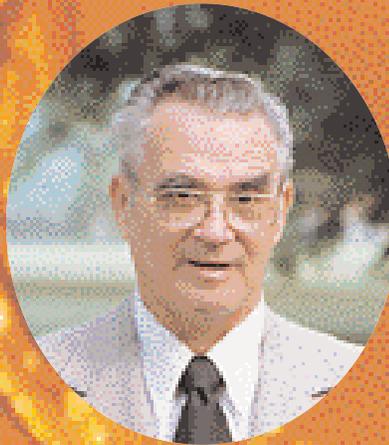
**Were it not for the inspiration of Greenville's Deas Richardson, the Number One Working Dog 2000 team of Ch. Storybook's Rip It Up might not have ever been assembled. "Jake," bred by Skip and Linda Abel was handled by Michael Shepherd for owners Keith and Cheryl Robbins.**

During his first assignment at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, the dashing young graduate of the U. S. Air Force Academy, Keith Robbins fell in love. After wooing her for only six months in 1965, Keith managed to talk Cheryl Conrad, an attractive blonde secretary at the Air Force base, into marrying him. Obtaining his Master's Degree from Ohio State University was Keith's next goal. But after only two years of marriage **Captain Keith Robbins** was called to serve our country in Vietnam. His thirteen month tour of duty kept in him in Saigon during the Tet offensive.

Completing his Masters in Industrial Engineering became a reality when he and Cheryl moved to Columbus, Ohio following the war. Their only child Joel was born about a year later.

Cheryl grew up with Cocker Spaniels and a Boston Terrier. After their first anniversary the couple purchased their first dog, a Pug named "Duke."

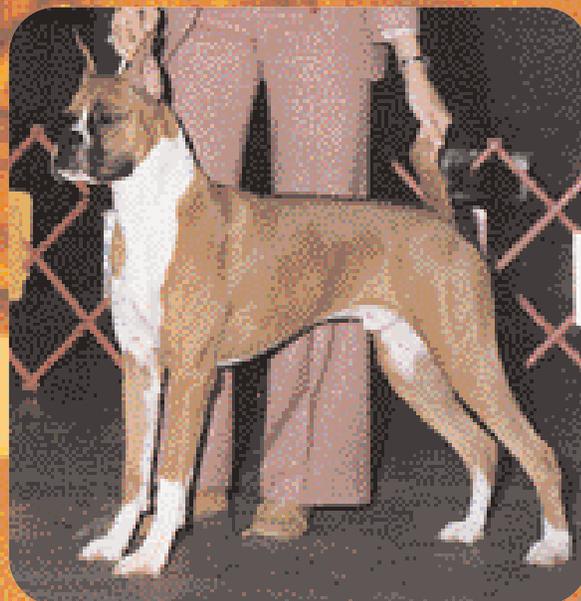
In 1975, their son, Joel was five years old, when they decided to get another dog. "Duke" was getting old and the Robbins wanted to have another pet in the house, so the loss would not be quite as devastating should their old Pug pass away. Keith wanted a larger breed for Joel to romp and roughhouse with outside. A Boxer seemed to fit the bill. A litter of Boxers had been born in the "mountains" of North



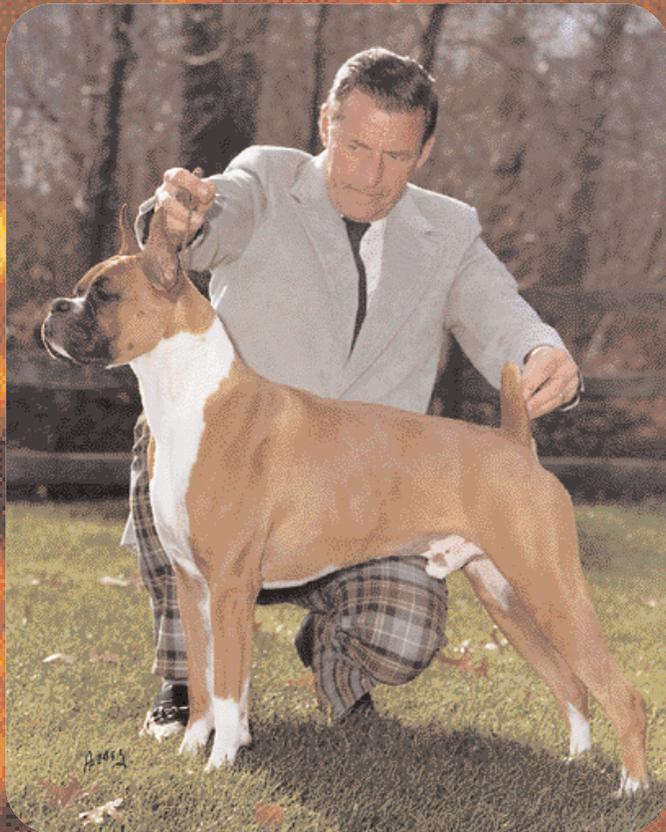
**JUDGE  
DEAS RICHARDSON**



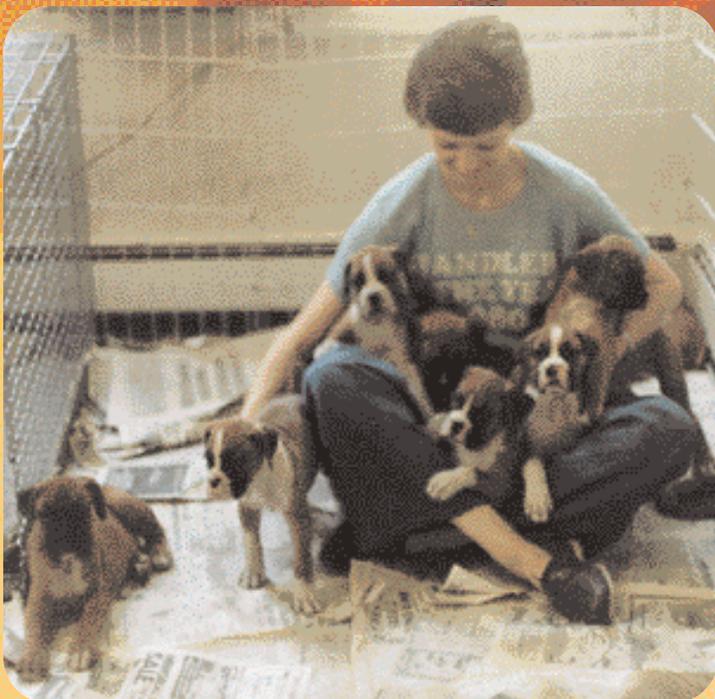
**CHERKEI'S FANTASTIK, 9 MOS. OLD  
WINNERS DOG & BOS FROM PUPPY CLASS**



**CHERKEI'S SON OF A GUN, 9 MOS. OLD  
RESERVE WD FROM BRED-BY**



**CH. CHERKEI'S SON OF A GUN. BOB WESTMINSTER 1980 WITH HANDLER DICK BAUM. SHOWN WITH BOB FORSYTH.**



**CHERYL ROBBINS 1982 IN NEW YORK. ANNIE/CHINO LITTER BORN 4/2/82.**

Carolina. The puppies had been sired by a dog of very good breeding, Salgray, they were told. Cheryl and Keith chose a flashy brindle male pup. Two weeks later they received a call that they could have a female littermate free of charge.

The pups were eating their breeders out of house and home. Cheryl expected Keith to put his foot down. Imagine three dogs in the house! Instead he relented. That little female, **Baron's Lady Come Lately**, went on to become the foundation bitch for **CherKei Boxers**. Her first litter produced two Champions sired by Ch. Salgray's Good Grief. One of those puppies, **Ch. CherKei's Son-Of-A-Gun** won Best of Breed at Westminster in 1980. He was the Robbins first Best In Show winner.

When Cheryl shared one of her favorite stories with me recently, I knew it contained an important lesson for every member of our sport.

*"After getting our first two Boxers, "Baron" and "Lady," my Mother called to tell us an AKC Match was being held in our town, Hendersonville, N.C. She thought our puppies were so pretty. We should take them and show them. I told her that did not interest me! A few days later, she called again, trying to talk me into going to the Match.*

*We hesitantly went, not having a clue as to what was going on. At the match we met a wonderful family who also had Boxers. Seeing NOVICE stamped all over us, they offered for their daughter to show the puppies for us. Our male, "Baron," went **Best Puppy In Match**. We were very proud and excited owners! As we carried our bundle of trophies to our station wagon, someone was calling out to us. It was the Judge who had done Best In Match. He introduced himself as **Deas Richardson, AKC Field Trial Representative**. Mr. Richardson asked what the breeding was of our puppies. He then said, **"I put your male up, but I would take your bitch home. If you breed her right, you could really get something."***

*We thanked him and headed home. I said to Keith, "Breed her! I don't want to breed her! And the thoughts of the breeder where we had purchased our Pug years earlier came flooding back. Her house overrun with dogs, the balls of dog hair that rushed at us as we entered her home and the odor that permeated the air was sickening. We bought the Pug puppy, basically just to get him out of there. So our thoughts of "breeders" wasn't real pleasant.*

*Well, Mr. Richardson's comments haunted me. That led me to the local library where I checked out every book on the Boxer breed including one on breeding "better" dogs. Learning became an obsession. I was staying up until three o'clock in the morning for weeks on end, poring through these books. Keith and I started to go to dog shows (I think we convinced ourselves that it would be a nice family hobby) within a few hours of driving distance, as suggested in the books, watching the Boxers being shown for the day, and talking to other breeders. We discovered very soon that every-*

one we talked to suggested a different stud dog for our bitch and knocked the ones others had said would be the best choice. We were very confused. Deciding to go by the book, we chose a dog that would be a good line breeding with our "Lady" and whose get we had admired in the show ring.

That litter produced our first two champions and our first Best In Show winner, **Ch. CherKei's Son-Of-A-Gun**. In 1980, we entered "**Gunner**" at Westminster Kennel Club. As the Best Of Breed was being judged, **Deas Richardson** (the Match Judge) came looking for us. He found us in the stands. Keith and I were still very much novice exhibitors, but he remembered us. He came up the steps, sat next to us and held my hand during the Breed. "**Gunner**" won the breed over many top winning Boxers. **That was a moment we will never forget! To this day we remember this wonderful man who took the time to encourage novices and went out of his way to do so. Over these twenty-six years, we have tried very hard to take the time and passion to the Novice that was given to us by Mr. Richardson. We will never forget him!**"

From North Carolina the family moved to Connecticut and then to Long Island, New York. Keith's career advancements kept them on the move. They hired professional handlers for the first several years until Keith's prodding convinced Cheryl to try it herself. After Cheryl had finished quite a few of their own dogs, friends started asking her to take their dogs in the ring. After a while, it was time for Cheryl to turn Professional Handler. But it took some convincing. Keith didn't mind traveling to shows on weekends and helping Cheryl with their dogs. He loved that. However, traveling to the shows, scoop poop and schlep dogs that were not his, he wasn't so sure about. But Cheryl convinced him that his help would help offset some of the expenses. And for a young family living on Long Island, that made it okay with Keith.

Cheryl retired from handling in 1995 and was approved by AKC to judge Boxers, Whippets and Jr. Showmanship. Keith has enjoyed the judging end of this sport too, he has been invited to judge many Sweepstakes but at this time he has no desire to apply for Boxers. Accompanying Cheryl to her overseas assignments is fun for him. Cheryl has judged in Japan, Australia, South Africa and the United Kingdom. She will be judging in Mexico in October. Keith will judge Futurity and Cheryl will judge Classes and Best of Breed in Manila, Philippines in November. Also on the agenda for Cheryl are assignments to judge Argentina in September 2002 and a second time to Japan in November 2002.

**CherKei** (of course coming from Cheryl and Keith) Boxers to date have bred or owned sixty U.S. Champions. They have campaigned seven All Breed Best In Show winners. Four of them they bred. Five American Boxer Club Sires of Merit and two American Boxer Club Dams of Merit were also bred by CherKei Kennels.

During the early years of showing dogs their



**JOEL ROBBINS AND "DAISY" 1981.  
JUDGE EDD BIVIN.**



**JOEL ROBBINS AND BENSON 1989.  
JUDGE GLEN SOMMERS.**



**CHERYL ROBBINS WITH CH CHERKE'S HIGH COTTON,  
"JAKE'S" GRANDFATHER**



**THIS MEMORY  
OF CHERYL  
ROBBINS IN HER  
HANDLING DAYS  
WAS SNAPPED  
BY  
LINDA AYERS  
TURNER KNORR**

twelve-year-old son Joel Robbins wanted to start showing a dog of his own. When his parents asked him which one of our dogs he would like to show, he said, "I want my own breed. I want to show a Pug." With fond memories of the Pug he had in his formative years, Joel tried Junior Handling. Cheryl didn't care for what she saw going on in and outside the ring. She told him if he wanted to finish "Daisy" he should show her in conformation only. The only hitch was that he would not allow his Mother to be near ringside. "I thought maybe he was embarrassed, Cheryl says. "Joel said, "No, I don't want anyone to know I'm your son, I want to win on my own."

He finished "Daisy" in a very short time. Then he took a few years off from showing, just traveling along with his mother and father to the shows. But once again, when he was sixteen, Joel developed a great love for Pointers. There was a VERY big top winner out at the time and his handler told Joel he had a litter of pups that were this dogs Grandkids. The Robbins family took a daytrip and came home with a beautiful liver and white Pointer puppy dog named "Benson." He was fabulous! Joel and "Benson" became quite a team. Joel finished him in a few short months. "I am sure that in some ways, a child growing up in a show dog family misses somewhat of a normal life. But then again, we found that traveling every weekend to dog shows as a family unit kept us close. To this day, we still have long time friends who ask us about Joel and his new family, according to his proud Mom!"

Now thirty-two years old, Joel is a Technical Service Engineer in a Printed Circuit Board Company in Peachtree City, Georgia. He met his wife, Dina while attending the University of Tennessee. They have two daughters who are the apples of their grandparent's eyes. Madeline is four years old and Gracie is two.

When I asked more about their thirty-six years together Cheryl responded, "When Keith and I started in the sport of purebred dogs he was very supportive. He loved the dogs and going to the shows, but of course, he didn't have the time to devote to the sport as I did. In the early years, the family always went together. Then with all of his business responsibilities Keith couldn't travel every weekend with me. When he couldn't go along, I usually asked one of my clients.

Keith's career kept the family on the move from Ohio to North Carolina, Connecticut for one and a half years and Lloyd Harbor, Long Island, New York for ten years. While in New York, Keith with three partners decided to buy a printed circuit board company being spun off from a large company where they had worked. In the past sixteen years their company has become the number one privately owned printed circuit board company in the United States.

Does Keith have any plans for retirement, I asked? "Cheryl says three years. Keith says five years. Oh well, I don't think he will ever totally retire. He loves working." They bought their future retirement home in 1999. Another one of their mutual loves is the beach. Being absolutely in love with the state of

Georgia, they decided that the Georgia beaches would fit their dreams. Their vacation future retirement home is on Tybee Island off the coast of Savannah. Someday, God willing, they will live at the beach permanently with a vacation home in the mountains of Georgia or North Carolina.

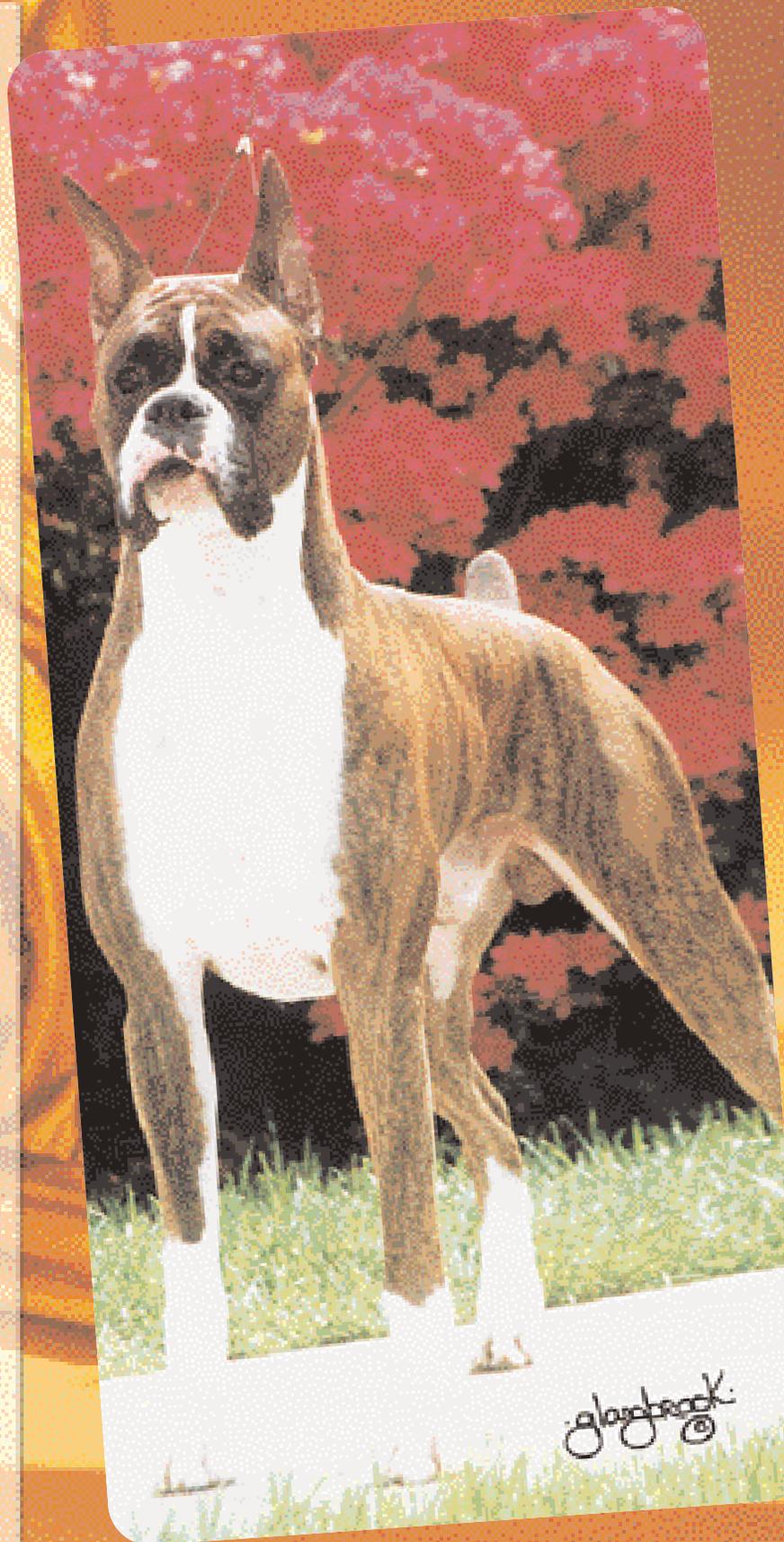
Cheryl continued, "In 1988 we moved to Newnan, Georgia from Long Island, New York. Being Southerners it was nice to get closer to home. We wanted a house with a few acres. We also needed a home we could build on an attached kennel. I never wanted any of our dogs to be in a kennel, but after breeding Boxers for twelve years, and being pretty successful, you have some old Champions that "just can't go anywhere, but here." Over the years we made a practice of keeping the "old folks" with us. We feel that they have given us so much enjoyment in the show ring and or in the whelping box, that the least we can do is let them enjoy their retirement years on the farm with us.

My dream came true when we found a nice home on forty-eight acres of rolling pastures outside of Newnan, Georgia. We have eighteen acres of pasture in front of the house with a winding drive up to our home on a hill. I took one look at the view from the front porch and said, it is going to have to be pretty bad for us not to buy it. Well it was nice inside. After ten years in New York, the beauty of the farmland and the peace and quiet sold us.

We built our show kennel attached to the back of our home just off my office. We have seventeen indoor outdoor runs. It is air conditioned with 10 foot ceilings, ceiling fans, lots of windows, and the heating system is copper pipes laid under the concrete floor that an oil fired hot water heater pumps through the pipes. There is a paddock on both sides of the kennel with large trees for shade. Each paddock is about one quarter to one half acre each. The kennel has its own washer and dryer and a grooming room with a raised built in tub. Our kitchen is right off from my office two steps down into the kennel. Also off the office is the whelping room with its own outside door with a small paddock for puppies and Mom. In the whelping room is a human bed, TV, and an exhaust fan. There are dutch doors from the kennel to the office and from the office to the house and from the office to the whelping room. All of these doors have paned top door panels, so the dogs are never closed off completely unless need be. It is the closest thing to having them all in our home. I can stand in my kitchen and look directly out to the kennel.

We added a lagoon shaped swimming pool and an eight hundred square foot bathroom with large stone planters filled with twenty foot tall ficus trees. There is also an area for exercise equipment we designed. Keith also added a covered walkway to his garage. Lots of landscaping followed. Construction continued on every day for one and a half years after we moved. It was worth it!"

The first thing arriving after they moved in was the Robbin's first horse. Being from Kentucky, Cheryl had always dreamed of owning horses. Two



**"JAKE"**  
**CH. STORYBOOK'S RIP IT UP**



**VERSATILE BEAUTY  
LINDA ABEL IN THE  
OBEDIENCE RING WITH  
BOXER "GRETCHEN"**



more followed. "People always ask if we ride them," Cheryl says. "We did when we first got them, but now they are just pasture potatoes and they sure do improve the landscape." Also on the property was a small barn. That became another project. It just had to be painted barn red with white trim. They had four large stalls built into it and finished off the inside with tongue and groove paneling and each stall opened into its own corral.

Next they decided that the empty space above the barn would be great turned into a guest apartment, a great get-away for anyone visiting with a bitch in season for breeding. Guests can get away after visiting with the Robbins at night and take their Boxer girl to the apartment with them. Both are more comfortable staying together.

"If you have a barn you have to have a couple of cats. So Keith and I headed off to the animal shelter. We have eight rescue cats, all spayed neutered and enjoying their life on our farm."

In 1998, Cheryl judged the Dog Classes at the American Boxer Club National. She counts that experience as a thrill of a lifetime. Another year one of the Robbins most famous bitches, **Ch. CherKei Arriba Wicked Calita** won the Veteran Class at the ABC over one of the breeds top winning bitches of all time. "Lita" was "Travis's" mother, "**Jake's**" grandmother.

About twenty years ago, Cheryl, very much a novice owner-handler, took a puppy bitch in the ring winning Winners Bitch for a five point major and Best of Breed. Not only was Cheryl terribly excited, but normally a very laid back Keith, jumped out of his chair leaping the fence into the ring. Everyone ringside got a very big laugh! Keith cites this win as a very special memory.

In our conversations Cheryl continued, "The early years in Connecticut and New York, were truly unforgettable! The Boxer world had large breed clubs in that area with lots of breeders. Many members were owner handlers. Every weekend in the New England area, Spring through Fall, we would take our trailers or motor homes to the shows parking next to each other six to eight rigs. We would cheer for each other in the ring. Dinner every night would be a big Boxer get-together with everyone trying to top each other with their special home cooked dishes. We would sit around telling stories, jokes, remembering past shows until late in the evening. This friendship and caring for each other and each other's dogs is what bonded us to this sport of pure-bred dogs. Those times are gone for us now, but we fondly remember and will never forget those wonderful times and the people who made them special!"

Cheryl and Keith noticed this young handler at the 1985 American Boxer Club National. He was showing this fabulous fawn male, Ch. Rochil's Grand Marshall, "Max." It was not until the next year when they met him. Keith and Cheryl were impressed by what a gentleman he was. Their friendship grew as Cheryl would run into **Michael Shepherd** at shows. They began setting up together and would follow

**QUITE DASHING  
SKIP ABEL WITH  
BOXER "PATSEY" IN  
JAPAN 1960**



**LINDA ABELS THIRD FROM LEFT WITH BOXER,  
"GRETCHEN" AND OTHERS ON A FLY-BALL TEAM**

each other to the next show site. What bonded the friendship was the similar way that they cared for the dogs in their charge. "I found out that there was someone else as neurotic as I was when it came to caring for their client's dogs," Cheryl related to me. "Michael truly loves dogs. He worries about them in the heat, how often they were exercised and the amount of attention spent on them."

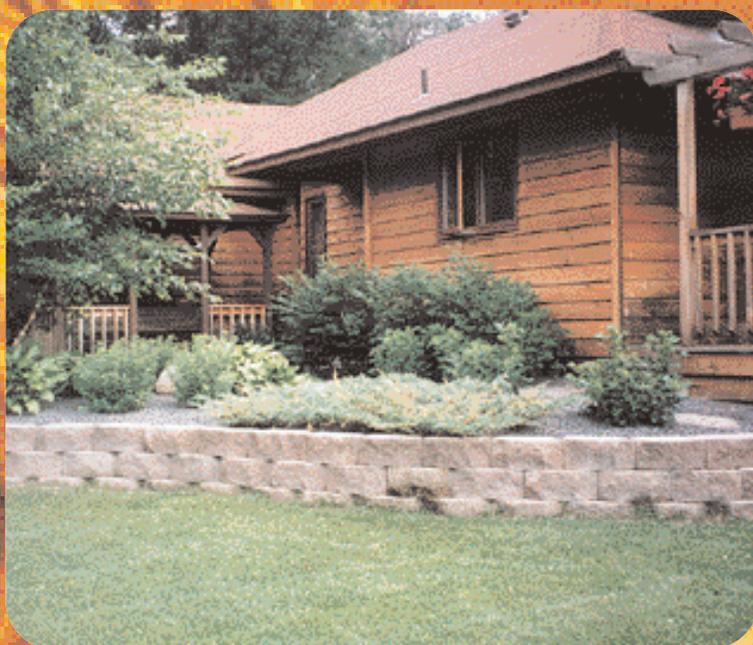
As Cheryl and Keith were still breeding while she was a professional handler, they needed someone to show their own dogs. It wasn't quite acceptable to show ones own dogs at the same time you were being paid by clients to show theirs. So their first choice of course was Michael. "He just had such a soft hand on the dogs and was such an exceptional handler and a great person. We felt when we sent dogs off with Michael we never had to worry. We were right! He finished several Boxers for us. When I retired as a Professional Handler, there was only one place for us to go, **Michael Shepherd**.

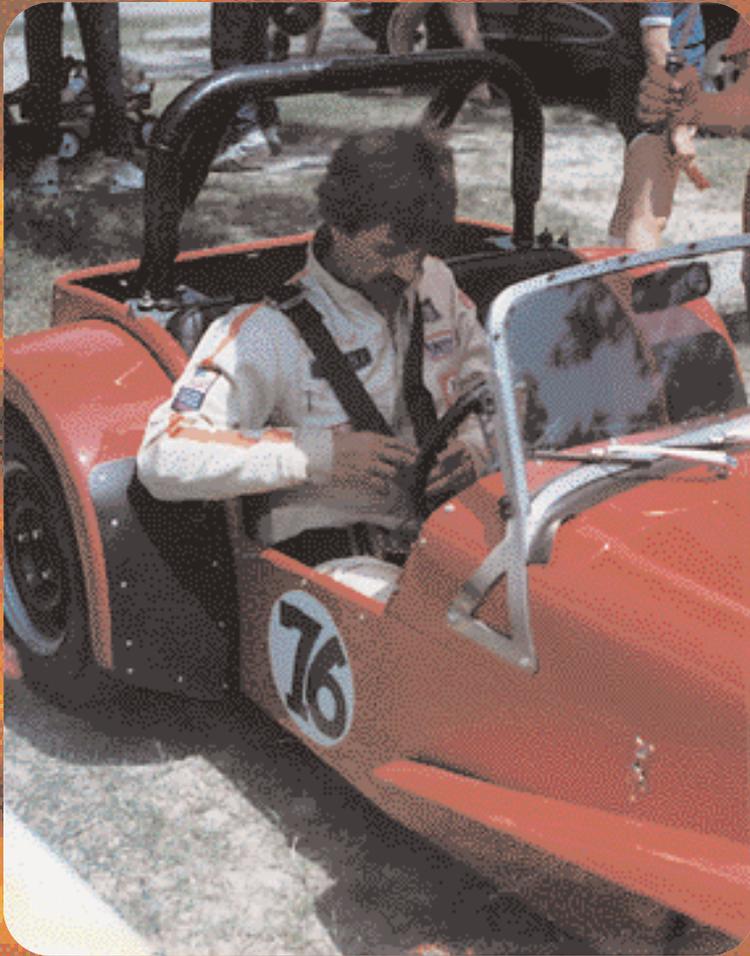
Cheryl had just finished a young dog **Ch. CherKei's Ultimate High**, "Travis," who was the son of their **Ch. CherKei's High Cotton** she had campaigned a few years earlier and had put multiple Best In Shows on him. "We felt that this young dog "Travis" had real potential. So Michael took "Travis" in November 1994 and began a Specials career with him in January 1995. Shown by Michael, "Travis" went on to follow in his father's footsteps winning multiple Bests In Show. They really clicked together. The love for the show ring "Travis" had was absolutely unbelievable! To this day, he has passed on that show attitude we believe comes at birth. That special "Look At Me, I'm Special Attitude."

"Travis" is the sire of "**Jake**," whose career we are now celebrating. After "Travis" retired, dear friends of whom we had bred into their lines years before, Dr. Ted Fickes (of **Ch. Arriba's Prima Dona**, last Boxer to win Westminster Kennel Club BIS, 1970, shown by Jane Forsyth) and Ginny Shames allowed us to campaign their boy, **Ch. Arriba Tallisman Ego**, "**Briar**." Michael and "Briar" were a beautiful team and after multiple Bests In Show to their credit, "Briar" retired in 1998.

At the 1996 ABC, breeders **Skip and Linda Abel** came to us and asked us to take a look at one of their champion girls they were considering breeding to our "**Travis**," **Ch. CherKei's Ultimate High**. It would be a very nice line breeding we thought and the bitch, **Ch. Storybook's Make Believe**, "**Annie**," was a very beautiful typey bitch. "Annie" was out of their first litter. We said we thought it could be a really good breeding. In August they contacted us by phone and said she was in season. In October of 1996 a beautiful litter was whelped. The Abels were great about keeping us posted on the litter and sent pictures regularly. They even sent a four-month-old puppy video with the three show prospects in the litter, romping around their local show training class in Minnesota. Then at the ABC in May of 1997 when the pups were seven months old, we got our first good look. They were all beautiful! At that point we said, "We need to talk."

## THE HOME OF SKIP AND LINDA ABELS





**SKIP ABELS BUCKLES UP FOR ANOTHER RACE!**



**BRAINERD INTERNATIONAL RACETRACK  
SKIP ABELS WAVES TO THE CROWD  
FROM THE STARTING GRID**

Keith and I went to a local restaurant with the **Abels** and **Michael**. We said we really wanted to keep a finger on this litter asking if we could have first refusal on buying one of the boys after they grew a little bit older. We thought that there could really be a star amongst them!

Skip and Linda contacted us a few months later and offered us one of the boys. We asked if we could buy the other one named "**Jake**" instead. They said, "No, we want to keep that one for ourselves." We asked if he continued to grow up like we thought would they consider leasing him to us for a "Specials" career in the future. They said, "Sure!" **Skip** handled "**Jake**" and his sister "**Demi**" to their Championships in record time. The other boy was sold and finished quickly also.

Then at the following ABC in 1998, we took another look and WOW! What a fabulous nineteen-month-old boy! Keith, Michael and I wondered if we were being kennel blind. A "Travis" son.....NO WE WEREN'T, we decided – we think this is the one that could really be the dog of a lifetime!

What a thrill the next two years were for all of us! "**Jake**" and Michael were winning many Bests In Show in 1999, but in the year 2000, they hit their mark. What a team they were. Not only did "**Jake**" and Michael achieve Number One Boxer, they climaxed the year by being the Number One Working Dog and Number Five All Breeds.

This has been so very special for us, so humbling and mind numbing that it still seems like a dream! Michael and "**Jake**" gave us so many memorable moments and a special year filled with breath taking and heart stopping moments that time can never take away. **Boxers are not my whole life, but they made my life whole!**

A huge part of this team is a wonderful lady named **Dottie James**, Michael's assistant. She has been a BIG part of the Special's careers on all three of the dogs Michael has campaigned for us. "**Jake**" always put on that little extra flair when **Dottie** was there! **Dottie** traveled with Michael most every weekend, but on a rare occasion there was a weekend or two that she needed to stay at the kennel, "**Jake**" would still do his big winning, but that extra little flair he puts on when **Dottie** was with the team could be noticed by only the closest of fans.

"**Jake**" is just four years old and already an ABC Sire of Merit with many kids in the ring and the whelping box waiting to step their feet into that ring their Father has filled so well. We have great hopes for a couple of "**Jake**" babies, "Travis" grandbabies, waiting in the wings.

When "**Jake**" won the ABC Top Twenty competition in 1999, we were so stunned I had to poke Keith and yell, "Keith, it's '**Jake**'." He won! Everyone was already on their feet cheering and hugging. Keith was still checking his catalog, because the announcer didn't announce the dogs name, they just said, "The winner is.....reading the handler's armband number. He thought, it just couldn't be him. We had a dog in the Top 20 for many years and had never won that award. "**Jake**" did! As "**Jake**" retired

at this year's ABC National (very fitting, since everything concerning "Jake" always took place at ABC), it was filled with celebration for his fabulous career and Michael piloting him to those top awards.

Many tears were shed, as Michael handed over his best friend for the past two and half years to "Jake's" breeders **Skip and Linda Abel** to go back to Minnesota and sleep on their couch. We were sad, but not like **Michael and Dottie**, it's just different when you have lived with one and shared wonderful wins on top of wonderful wins and every waking moment that HE is your main dog!"

Cheryl knows this kind of sadness. She sent home "Specials" dogs she had campaigned when she was a handler. When it was the moment to hand your best friend over to their owner, her heart would break. Handlers are supposed to love these dogs as their own and give them the best care possible without getting attached. What emptiness when we hand these beloved dogs over to their owners. Tough life, this handler's life. Cheryl knows, she's been there and is very in touch with what her handler feels. She is compassionate to and very sensitive to what makes a good client.

The Robbins responded to the following questions:

If you were preaching a sermon to a congregation of dog show judges, what would be your topic?

*To thine own self be true.*

You must have a favorite all time dog show judge. Without mentioning his or her name, tell me what qualities make them such a great one.

*The qualities that make them such a great one: knowledge, integrity, image, confidence and friendliness*

Charities advance many causes. Are you actively involved with any particular ones, dog related or not?

*AKC Canine Health Foundation. Cheryl serves on the President's Council.*

*AKC Charitable Trust (Cheryl is a board member and Keith takes an active role).*

*Take The Lead (Keith and Cheryl have co-hosted with Cecile Ruggles the benefit for the past three years held at Astro Hall Circuit, Houston, Texas and plan on continuing to do so)*

**Storybook Kennels** is owned by **Skip and Linda Abel** of Elk River, Minnesota. **Ch. Storybook's Rip It Up** was born close to the Mississippi River surrounded by woods, meadow and ponds. With no other homes in view the Abels dogs are accustomed to sharing the terrain with wildlife all around.

What a success story lies in the background of "Jake." In only fifteen short years **Skip and Linda Abel's** dog hobby transformed from being novices in the obedience ring to winning the first Flyball Dog Degree for a Boxer to breeding the Number One Working Dog, our nation's number five Dog All-Breeds! With one exception **Skip** has handled of their homebred champions to their titles gathering





several Group Ones along the way.

Like that of Keith Robbins, our **United States Air Force** influenced the life of Skip Abel. Col. Howard Abel, Skip's father kept his family on the move as he proudly served our nation. Their family pets were Boxers. Skip fondly remembers having two consecutive Boxers named "Patsey" during the time his father served in Japan.

Todd and Tony Abel and Matt and Brooke Letourneau are the grown children of Skip and Linda Abel. It was for them that Boxers originally joined the family.

The arrival of their second grandchild is anxiously awaited this February.

Linda's career with Procter and Gamble is home based so she can be with the dogs. Skip commutes forty minutes each way to his office at Medtronics. **Fortune 500** names his company as one of the top 100 companies to work for in the United States. In charge of logistics and distribution at their Minnesota headquarters Skip sent two vans full of his company's pacemakers, heart valves, stints and other medical devices directly to the New York area for the victims of the recent terrorists attacks at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

After he restored several old classic automobiles, classic car racing became Skip's passion. He drove Porsches, Lotus, MG's and Corvettes.

Today he unwinds fly fishing on his own property. Feeding the many varieties of birds habituating on her land takes up much of Linda's time. Visitors are amazed at the many flowers surrounding the Abel's resort like Cedar home.

After hanging up their fishing rods Skip and Linda took time to respond to some questions I asked.

Who or what reference is your greatest resource for solutions in solving genetic problems?

*In the Boxer breed we are very fortunate to have the American Boxer Charitable Foundation, which raises money to support research for Boxer health and longevity. The Canine Health Foundation of the American Kennel Club then matches the money raised by the ABCF. I believe to date the American Boxer Club has donated more to the AKC Canine Health Foundation than any other National breed club. Two studies that are being sponsored in part by the ABCF are a study being done by Dr. Modiano and the AMC Cancer Research Center in Denver, Colorado, and a heart study being conducted by Dr. Kate Meirs at Ohio State University. Cancer and Boxer cardiomyopathy are the two biggest health problems with our breed. As a national breed club we are working on both problems.*

*We have nothing to hide regarding the health of our dogs. We try to be open and candid regarding any health issues we encounter, and encourage others to do the same. We are in this sport for the love of the breed, and feel it would be an injustice to them not to do all we can for them.*

About what subject are you most passionate?

*Health*

How many litters do you usually have each year?

*We had our first litter in 1993, which produced three champions. One of those bitch champions, Ch. Storybook's Make Believe, "Annie," was bred to Ch. CherKei's Ultimate High SOM. From that second litter we also got three champions, one of which is "Jake," Ch. Storybook's Rip It Up. We know how lucky we were to have accomplished this in just our second litter. Yes, some of it was an eye for what we thought would be a good match on paper, but never in our wildest dreams did we imagine such a great match up. Our third litter came from a match up of another bitch champion from our first litter, to "Jake." This litter produced two champions. We currently have two young dogs (one dog, one bitch) from our fourth and last litter who are just now entering the show ring.*

Have you given your input to the AKC Canine Health Foundation?

*Yes, by our membership and support in the American Boxer Charitable Foundation*

The AKC Canine Foundation has invited you to speak to its group of scientists. What would you ask from them?

*More commitment and presence at dog shows. Get the word out about their work. Get in front of veterinarians so that when a client is presented to them with something that they are working on, that veterinarian can input into their case studies.*

Since you earned recognition as having bred the best, has your National Breed Club asked you to teach any of their seminars for judging? No

You are planning a seminar for novice breeders, what will be your most important piece of advice?

*Remember, the puppies you help produce are your responsibility until the day they die, regardless of who owns them and where they live. Be committed to breeding for the health and well being of the breed. Breed to better what you have. You will never, ever make money at breeding. Be very choiceful with the dogs you breed...not every dog and bitch merits being bred. Breed with both your head and your heart.*

Who or what inspired you to enter your first dog show?

*For me (Linda) it was the competition. It was also getting out and meeting others who had Boxers and were as proud of their dogs as we were of ours. Our very first show dog was a flashy fawn dog that my husband Skip put all the points on, minus one major. He was just an okay dog conformation-wise, but a great ambassador for the breed. Only problem was, he hated the show ring. So we retired him to the couch and went about finding our foundation bitch who we looked for two years.*

Tell us about your favorite dog you ever bred.

*That's hard because they are all very special. But*



**CH. STORYBOOKS RIP IT UP  
"JAKE"  
ABC TOP 20 WINNER  
1999**



**MICHAEL SHEPHERD  
WITH  
CH. CHERKEI'S ULTIMATE HIGH,  
"TRAVIS" — "JAKE'S" SIRE**

*"Jake" has made us so proud. He is a combination of a great show dog and best friend. He is everything we wanted to accomplish and more. We are not experienced breeders, merely lucky ones. To have "Jake" achieve what he has and bring us to this level we are extremely grateful to Michael Shepherd and Keith and Cheryl Robbins for believing in him and committing to him.*

Physical fitness is high on the agenda of **Michael Shepherd**. Following a workout with his personal trainer, "Jake's" handler responded to these questions.

What did you do to celebrate winning your Top Working award? *Vacationed in Washington State*

Did you do anything special for **Jake**?  
*Bought him a steak*

In the ring you exude confidence. Do you worry about what others think of you? *No*

If you were teaching a class of today's young Junior Handlers what is the most important piece of advice you would give them?

*You can never be too clean, dogs always come first. Finish school first.*

Excluding yourself, of course, name the greatest handler of all time.

*Larry Downey*

My most memorable moment was  
*Finishing my first dog.*

Do you set priorities and goals or let the chips fall where they may?

*I set priorities and goals, then I let the chips fall where they may.*

Who is your greatest cheerleader?

*Jake's owners, breeder and my friends (too many to mention), my parents David Robinson and TIGER*

Are you a member of the PHA?

*No*

The sport requires you to maintain an extremely high energy level. Do you have any special physical workout program or special diet? If so please share it with us.

*Yes, I work out at the gym four days a week with a personal trainer and I try to get in some kind of workout on the weekend. I stick to a low fat high protein diet.*

What special things did you do to keep the deep connection between you and "Jake"?

*I fed him and he slept on my bed.*

How many dog shows did you travel to by airplane last year?

*Eight weekends*

How do you deal with the intense pressure it requires to become No. One?

*I'm not a big worrier. I did my best and as long as the dog felt good and was having a good time I figured that was all that was in my control.*

Considering the great amount of time you spend driving to shows every week, do you listen to books on tape?

*Yes*

If so, what would you recommend?

*The mysteries of James Patterson and Carl Hiasson*

Do you have a lucky charm?

*No*

Without naming him or her, please describe your favorite judge.

*Petite with big blue eyes.*

Show stes vary so much today. Share your list of most preferred ones. Why?

*Tampa (summer cluster), San Antonio (River Center), Enumclaw, Washington*

Has any particular representative of the American Kennel Club ever been helpful to you? How? Name them only if you wish.

*Yes, several have been very helpful.*

Who is your mentor?

*Bill Aston, Linda Stevens and Bobby Pebbles, Johnny Johnson*

Would someone else say the same about you? Who?

*Yes, Patty Chandler and Paige McCarver*

Okay, you get three wishes. What are they?

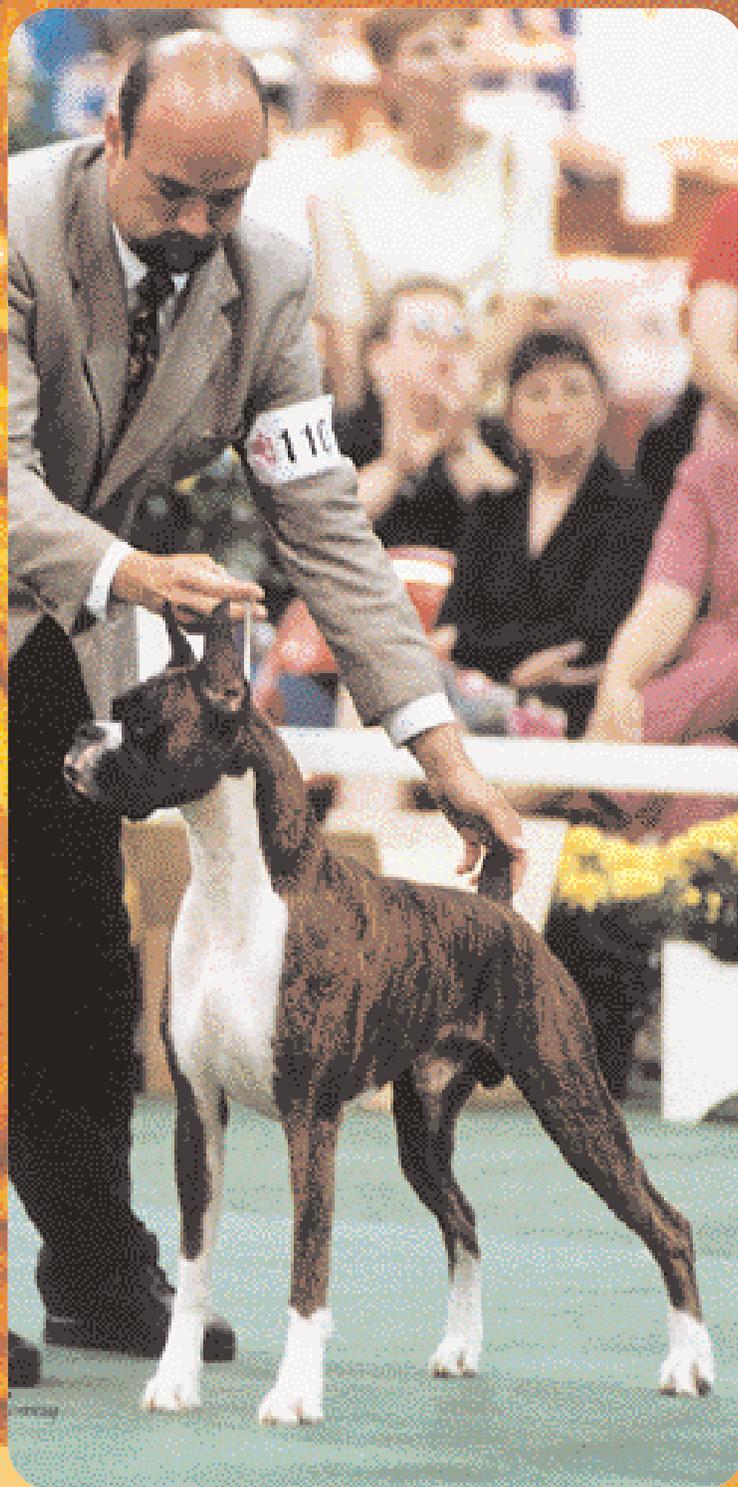
*Win the lottery, then I can give my two remaining wishes away.*

Will I be interviewing you again next year?

*No, I'm having an easy year.*

**Red, White and Blue** stands for something greater than just another Best in Show. The colors are the symbol of our nation. Let us pray for unity among ourselves as we get back to helping others in all phases of our lives. Consider what you can do to reach out and help someone new to our sport.

*Close your eyes. . . . lift your head toward the heavens. . . . Do you recognize that Southern Drawl shouting Hallelujah? Invest a little of your valuable time encouraging a novice. The entire fancy will reap the rewards!*



**“JAKE” WAITING FOR JUDGE  
MICHELE BILLINGS TO MARK HER  
BOOK AWARDING HIM BEST IN SHOW  
AT THE ASTRO HALL IN HOUSTON**