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## The Free Lance-Star

### Lovable LABRADORS Couple has dogged mission at Deep Run Farm

The dog days never end at Deep Run Farm in Goldvein. But that's OK with owners Phyllis Giroux and Jack Jagoda. By Lee Woolf



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Date published: 10/7/2006

By LEE WOOLF

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HYLLIS GIROUX and Jack Jagoda are leaders of the pack.

That's true whether they are sitting amid a litter of squirming puppies, guiding a group of energetic Labrador retrievers on a walk, or turning a Fauquier County cattle farm into one of the top training, breeding and canine health-care facilities in the nation.

Phyllis Giroux, co-owner of Deep Run Farm, praises a yellow Labrador after the dog completes a basic obedience exercise. Positive conditioning is an essential part of the training.

Deep Run Farm sits on 116 acres in Goldvein, not far from the Stafford-Fauquier border and about 20 miles northwest of Fredericksburg. [View More Images from this story](#)

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Giroux, who is 56, and Jagoda, 61, purchased the property about 12 years ago. They were longtime friends who decided to go into business together. Giroux was a practicing veterinarian from the Tidewater area. Jagoda formerly owned and managed All-American Sports Awards in Stafford County.

Both are dog lovers and have a special affection for Labs.

"I had this dream, if I could just find some land," Giroux said. "Then the farm became available. And I knew I could just keep wishing, or make it so.

"We could ill afford it when we started. We figured there was a good chance we'd run it for two or three years and then go bankrupt."

"I think the place grew in spite of us," added Jagoda with a smile.

The business started as a breeding operation with about a dozen Labs and two or three litters of puppies each year.

Now, there are about 60 dogs on-site, and the business includes breeding, obedience training, field training, boarding and health care. Besides Giroux and Jagoda, there are four full-time employees and additional part-timers for the busy seasons. And these days, each month brings two litters of about eight puppies each to join the farm family.

Giroux said about 80 percent of the farm's business comes from referrals. Dogs with Deep Run Farm on their resume have earned hundreds of titles in various competitions, from field trials and agility tests to American Kennel Club breed shows at places like Madison Square Garden in New York City.

Giroux proudly points out that the No. 1 "beauty contest" Lab in America was trained at Deep Run, as was the first search-and-rescue dog that entered the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001.

A joint venture

Giroux, with her extensive veterinary background, and Jagoda, a seasoned hunter and trainer, are considered experts in their fields.

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With 50 years of combined experience, both are published writers, frequent hosts for dog demonstrations, clinics and competitions, and contributors to training videos, TV programs and outdoor magazines.

Retrievers from Deep Run Farm have demonstrated their skills on ESPN, TNN, Outdoor Life, Animal Planet and the Outdoor Channel. And several episodes of regular programs on those TV networks have been filmed on-site.

Giroux and Jagoda even hosted a re-triever demonstration at the Rayburn House Office Building in downtown Washington that included having dogs splash amid decoys in the fountain pool next to the building.

Giroux, an admitted type-A personality, received her veterinary degree from Michigan State University. She has a master's degree in animal behavior, is a certified canine chiropractor and specializes in canine reproduction and sports medicine.

She also practices integrated canine medicine, including homeopathy, herbal medicine and acupuncture. In addition, Giroux has found time to be active as a handler in dog events in breed, obedience and field since 1974.

"Sometimes I have to tell her to slow down, because she would work 24 hours a day," said Jagoda of his partner. "Sometimes, she'll be sending out e-mail at 4 o'clock in the morning. She's more focused than I am. And she's a great business person always on top of things."

As for Jagoda, he is "a great dog trainer and the ultimate handyman," according to Giroux. "And that's important on a 116-acre farm with all the vehicles and facilities we have."

Jagoda is the co-founder and a past president of the North American Hunting Retriever Association. He trained the first-ever "master hunting retriever," and his dogs have earned honors in competitions throughout the U.S. and at events as far afield as South Africa and Italy.

Jagoda's sports-awards business in Stafford kept him busy for almost 30 years before he made the midlife leap to full-time dog training.

"Yeah, this is retirement," joked Jagoda, as he sat in a sweat-soaked shirt during a recent break from his farm duties.

"I was in a pretty stressful business. And at first, the dogs were good therapy to get my mind off work. There were almost no retriever clubs back then--this was the early '70s."

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"Then I remember going to a field trial at Fort A.P. Hill and that's when I got hooked. I watched the dogs work, and I thought, 'I've got to get involved in this.'"

A breed apart

Labrador retrievers have ranked as the most popular breed of dog for the past 15 years. They are known as lively, good-natured and intelligent pets, with big appetites and a need for exercise.

"This athletic dog can go from the hunt to the show ring to the family room with equal aplomb," states one Lab Web site.

Indeed, some dogs from Deep Run Farm have found their niche splashing into icy waters in the Chesapeake Bay to retrieve game birds, while others enjoy a comfortable life on Park Avenue in New York, where professional dog-walkers provide the exercise.

All Labs are muscular dogs with short, water-resistant coats. They come in three colors--black, yellow and chocolate. Although no distinction is made by the American Kennel Club, there are two types of Labs--English and American.

English Labs are shorter and stockier with fuller faces. They tend to show well in conformation classes and are known as the "beauty contest" dog. American Labs are longer, leaner and more athletic-looking. Their high energy level is better suited for a working retriever.

Both types of Labs can be found at Deep Run Farm.

"As puppies, the English Labs are easier to hold and a little more cuddly," Jagoda said. "The American Labs are thinner and more active. They're always squirming."

Bonnie Anthony of Bethesda, Md., owns a 3-year-old yellow Lab named Lacey, who currently is the No. 1-ranked "beauty contest" Lab in America. Lacey was trained at Deep Run Farm.

"It's just a great facility," said Anthony by phone from Denver, Colo. "I liked the people right away. And I trusted them.

"I think the biggest thing they did was instill tremendous confidence in Lacey. Even though in competition, she basically just stands and looks pretty, things like attitude and even stamina are important. And at Deep Run Farm, those qualities are maximized in the training there."

Jagoda said the most satisfying thing for him as a trainer is just watching each dog's individual progress.

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"I'm constantly amazed at what they are capable of doing," he said. "From being able to sit on command just a few weeks after being born to following hand directions at 300 or 400 yards in a field trial they're just remarkable."

Jagoda said much of the training is communicated with simple body movements and eye contact.

"Dogs need to know what the rules are," he said. "And if they understand what the rules are from the very beginning, they're comfortable with that."

"A dog that is always in trouble and is not invited into social situations because of his behavior just hasn't been taught the rules. It's all about good citizenship and good social skills."

Although Jagoda is clearly the leader of the pack when it comes to training, even he admits that Deep Run Farm has another "top dog."

That would be Elvis.

Now 12 years old, Elvis is a 90-pound yellow Lab who earned his grand master hunting retriever title in just one year and was featured on TV's "Animal Planet" as a prime example of a working Lab.

"Elvis is really the one who put this farm on the map," Jagoda said proudly.

And now, it seems, much of Elvis' drive and desire has been passed along to a talented son, Deep Run Jailhouse Rock, better known as "Rocky."

Dogged determination

In field trials, dogs are asked to retrieve "birds" hidden several hundred yards away by responding only to a whistle and hand signals. Hunt tests require the same skills, but are somewhat less competitive and involve shorter distances.

In a recent demonstration, Rocky, who is 3 years old and weighs 85 pounds, was sent by Jagoda across the rolling pasture at Deep Run Farm toward a small pond.

Once directed, a dog races at full speed and doesn't look back until it hears a whistle. Sure enough, Rocky ran straight on course and then splashed into the water. Jagoda had hidden the "bird" in two feet of grass on an earthen dam at the far end of the pond more than 200 yards away.

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If Rocky did not smell the "bird" as he climbed out of the water, Jagoda was ready to whistle him to a halt and use hand signals to direct him slightly to the left or right. Otherwise, the dog's training would keep him running on course over the dam and out of sight into the woods.

Phyllis Giroux, co-owner of Deep Run Farm, praises a yellow Labrador after the dog completes a basic obedience exercise. Positive conditioning is an essential part of the training.

Not to worry.

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Rocky jumped out of the water, quickly climbed the bank and immediately reacted to the "bird." A moment later it was in his mouth, and he was again swimming back across the pond. Then it was only a few seconds before Rocky was delivering his prize to Jagoda's hand.

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"For a hunt test, that was just about perfect," said Jagoda with a smiling Rocky at his feet.

"Judges score on a one-to-10 basis and deduct points as necessary. Some dogs would have strayed off course. Some would have run around the edge of the water. Some may have not picked up the scent once they got to the dam."

But Rocky is a lean, keen retrieving machine.

Jagoda estimated that a dog of Rocky's age and "master hunter" credentials might be worth as much as \$15,000.

"But I wouldn't sell him at any price," Jagoda said. "We've developed a special relationship through all the hours of training. I'd say we've become best friends."

Puppy paradise

Rocky, of course, represents the top of the line. But other dogs and services from Deep Run Farm don't come cheap.

The base boarding fee is \$25 per day, and is available to all breeds in the farm's spacious kennel area. The training rate is \$350 per week, or \$1,200 a month, which includes boarding and exercise. Stud fees range between \$750 and \$1,000. Show-quality puppies cost \$1,500 to \$2,500.

If this seems pricey to the average dog owner, it should be pointed out that volume business is not the goal at Deep Run Farm.

"Just because someone comes in carrying a checkbook, it doesn't mean they'll leave with a puppy," Jagoda said firmly.

To ensure that every young dog finds a good home, potential customers are asked to fill out an extensive puppy adoption questionnaire before they visit.

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Among the questions: What happened to your last dog? How many hours a week do you plan to spend with your dog? If your puppy swallowed a sock and the veterinarian told you it needed an operation that would cost \$1,200, what would you do?

"Every day, it seems like all of us have less time for things that are important to us," Giroux said. "So, people really need to think about it before they add another little family member. You don't just put dogs in the yard and throw food at them."

Giroux said the goal at Deep Run Farm is to deliver top-of-the-line purebred Lab puppies that are genetically sound, athletic and intelligent, with little risk of hip, elbow, eye or other health issues.

"Maybe the best explanation of our breeding operation is that we've tried to answer all the tough questions," Giroux said. "We try to greatly reduce the risks of things like epilepsy and allergies and just provide our customers with the best of the best."

The Web site for Deep Run Farm (deeparunretrievers.com) offers an extensive look at the puppies' growth and development, beginning with the mother's prenatal care and the delivery in a special area of the main farmhouse.

The puppies are rubbed briskly within seconds of their birth to acquaint them with the smell and touch of humans. They are constantly kept on surfaces with good traction and exposed to all the noises and smells of normal household life.

Gradually, the pups grow accustomed to their surroundings. By about three weeks, they are given soft toys to play with and obstacles to climb on. After about six weeks, they have left mom behind and spend much of their time outside, enjoying various types of exercise and learning the sights and sounds of the farm. All of the puppies also receive basic obedience training.

Giroux said the activity and attitude of each pup is recorded daily to provide extensive notes on personality development. This helps fit each puppy with the right family situation.

For example, Giroux said, a puppy who seems independent, who likes to explore and wander from the others, who might jump over an obstacle rather than go around it, and who is always the first one in the water, probably would make a good hunting companion.

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On the other hand, she said, a puppy who is comfortable as a member of the group and who seems content on this side of the fence, might make a better family pet.

Giroux said all their dogs have an identification microchip implanted under the skin before they leave Deep Run Farm.

She also said it is easy to get attached to the dogs and often sad to see them go.

"When that happens, I always try to remember that we have many dogs here," she said. "But that dog going out the driveway is going to a good home where it may be the only dog. So, I'm happy for all of them."

A satisfied customer

Subject: Hello Deep Run

From: Jim and Stache

Date: Sat. 4 Feb. 2006

Greetings,

My name is Jim. I purchased a black lab puppy from you two years ago. His name is Stache, his parents were Teddy and Jordan. While I understand that the majority of your dogs are field champions and are some of the finest examples of gun dogs in the world, you may remember that Stache was destined for a different path.

We graduated the Philadelphia Police Academy in August; Stache was certified as a Cadaver Dog. Not long after graduation we were requested to go to Mississippi to search for the missing after Katrina. Stache was amazing. He worked hard during the day, and in the evening was the joy of the rescue workers at the tent city that we lived in. He was a hard-working field dog when searching and a goofy, happy puppy in the evening.

That which makes your dogs great in the field also makes the line great for the service of mankind.

Sincerely,

Jim and Stache

LEE WOOLF, a longtime reporter and editor with The Free Lance-Star, is bureau manager at the newspaper's North Stafford office. Contact him at 540/735-1970, or Email: [lwoolf@freelancestar.com](mailto:lwoolf@freelancestar.com).



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