



# THE Rabbit Advocate



PROVIDING INSIGHTS INTO THE LIVES OF HOUSE RABBITS

SUMMER 2008

## Bunny Based Businesses Provide the Goods

*“We started and maintained a business in part to lead by example, to run a company the way we wished more companies were run”*

By Sarah Yasutake

Have you ever dreamed of combining your love of rabbits with owning your own business? Some of our very own Rabbit Advocates have done just that, and they are using their businesses to help rabbits, too.

### **Leith Petwerks ([www.LeithPetwerks.com](http://www.LeithPetwerks.com))**

Soon after Amy Young-Leith and Scot Leith married in 1992, they adopted Dinkum, a Dutch/Harlequin mix rabbit. The couple loved Dinkum, and they wanted to find housing that was functional, safe, and comfortable for him, yet easy for them to clean and attractive enough to keep in the living room.



After a frustrating search, they decided that they would design and build something themselves. From the original home that Scot constructed for Dinkum, the Leith Petwerks Bunny Abode line of condo-style housing was born. Leith Petwerks opened its doors in 1997 (figuratively speaking—the company was online from day one), selling only the Bunny Abode Condo. Today, the company also offers its customers a full line of supplies for house rabbits and other small animals.

Things weren't always easy, but Amy and Scot credit their success today to the small and gradual steps they took to grow their business. “Starting a business is always difficult, but never more so than when you are poor recent college graduates with no money,” Amy says. “To say that we were bootstrapped is an understatement. We used each small improvement to keep the momentum going.”

In the beginning, Amy says, she and Scot were happy to have just one or two orders a week. But before they knew it the business took off, and their customer base grew in response to the great customer service that Amy and Scot provided. The word spread among their friends in rabbit rescue, and soon their customers began to request that they carry more products.

As the company grew, Amy and Scot moved the business into a succession of ever-larger locations, starting with a friend's single-car garage in Indiana. In 2005, the couple acted on an

“undeniable urge to move to the Pacific Northwest” and moved themselves to Salem, Oregon, leaving the business in Indiana. They were able to operate the business remotely for two years by working with two employees in Indiana, but in 2007 they decided to move the business to Salem. Today, the business is operated out of a warehouse space with three employees: Scot, Amy, and an employee who helps Scot in the wood shop.

Amy and Scot are proud that when customers call or email Leith Petwerks, they reach the people who own and operate the company—people with 20 years combined experience with house rabbits, rescue, and fostering. These people know rabbits—Amy was the first House Rabbit Society (HRS) educator in Indiana when she took on the role in 1994, and she was Chapter Co-Manager of the Indiana HRS Chapter, which she helped create in the late 1990s. They have never used commission-paid salespeople or outsourced call center staff, choosing instead to make a personal commitment to their customers by providing customer service themselves. The way they see it, every person who contacts them is not only a customer, but also a friend.

Another unique attribute of Leith Petwerks is that the company uses U.S.-made components whenever possible, even though they can be difficult to obtain in today's outsourced climate.

Amy and Scot started Leith Petwerks because they love bunnies, and they use profits from the company to support rabbit foster and rescue efforts. They see themselves as an inspiration to people who want to use their businesses for the greater good. “We started and maintained a business in part to lead by example, to run a company the way we wished more companies were run,” Amy says. “To gather people around and help them to understand the very dire importance of their choice—every single choice—of where their dollars go. Because if they go to a fat cat or a foreign country, that doesn't do you any good. But us? We help the bunnies with the dollars we receive.”

*continued on page 5*

# Hillsboro rabbits enjoy life in new homes

One of Oregon's most notorious animal hoarding cases continues to make headlines. In the fall of 2006, the Hillsboro home of Miriam Sakewitz was raided by local police and animal control officials. Nearly 200 rabbits, a dog and some guinea pigs were confiscated. In police custody for months, Rabbit Advocates and Oregon Humane Society volunteers cared for the rabbits each day.

In April, 2007, Sakewitz plead guilty to animal hoarding. She was placed on probation and ordered not to have an animal for five years. Since that time, a number of probation violations have been noted.

All of the animals taken from Sakewitz's home have been placed in foster or adoptive homes. Many suffered poor health or behavior problems. But from inauspicious beginnings, most have thrived in their new homes. Here is an update on just three of the Hillsboro bunnies.

## **Cobra**

*By Leann Bleakney*

Cobra was described by humane society staff as "a troubled little bunny." He was

the last of the Hillsboro bunnies to be housed because Cobra bit and drew blood from the hands of all who cared for him. No one was spared, not police officers, animal welfare workers or volunteers. His name started as a joke but stuck because it so accurately described the way this tiny 3-pound rabbit could dart from across his cage to latch onto a human hand. He struck like a snake.

I took Cobra home. Neutering soon after bringing him home quashed his temper. He no longer bites. In fact, Cobra has been further tamed by a sweet little female bunny named Maybell, rescued from Wilsonville Park by volunteer Karen Corsini. Cobra and Maybell now live happily together, and lay spooned side by side.

Cobra and Maybell are foster rabbits and are available for adoption to a very special home.



**Poppy**

## **Poppy**

*By Kevin Gerdes*

Poppy arrived at the Hillsboro warehouse where the rabbits were housed with one of his hind legs sticking out at a right angle from his body. His leg was broken just below the hip. He lived with his leg like that for about four months until he could be released to our custody. He also had a stubborn respiratory infection which finally responded to extremely powerful antibiotics. He came to our home with two of his brothers and bonded almost immediately with one of our lonely girls named Velvet.

Velvet babies Poppy and frets if he is out of her sight for even a few minutes. Velvet has a very strong caregiver instinct. She had previously been bonded with a 12-year-old mini lop named Peanut. She seemed lost after he passed and took Poppy on immediately. Poppy was neutered at the same time that his leg was removed and after Velvet taught him a bit of etiquette he is a good companion for her as well. If I had to describe Poppy in a single word it might be "fierce." He is not an especially nippy rabbit. Those are usually the frightened and timid ones. When Poppy is loose on the floor the cats give him a wide berth. He will clear the floor of



**Cobra on left, with partner Maybell**

# Animal hoarding a misunderstood condition

any cat foolish enough not to run. I don't think that Poppy knows there is anything wrong with him. He scoots around like crazy and does three-legged binkies and generally acts like he is awfully glad to be alive. If anyone has earned that right it is certainly him. The little guy has a heart that would do a lion proud.

## Charcoal

By Bobbi Waggoner

I picked up a very sick little bunny from Hillsboro. She was coming home with me to die. Charcoal had many very large lumps in her abdomen that were easily felt when she was picked up. I had made a vet appointment for two days later to be sure that whatever I did it was for her ease and comfort. My vet, Dr. Mary Blankevoort, said we could operate, but with no guarantee of success since we did not know exactly what was wrong. Little Charcoal went under the knife weighing 4.5 pounds. Two vets and an hour later, three tumors were removed that together weighed 1.5 pounds, about a third of her total body weight. That following weekend she went to the beach with me so that I could continue to feed her food around the clock.

She is now about 4.5 pounds with bright eyes, a shiny black face and providing lovely fur for a yarn spinner. She is a quiet, opinionated, loving rabbit and does the occasional binky. She wows people because she is so beautiful.

*Editor's note: Charcoal (right) passed away in July, 2008. Until her last day, she continued to sit up on her hind legs to very properly receive her papaya tablets, and she was very beautiful.*



By Amy Young-Leith

The concept of an "animal hoarder" has received attention in many communities in the past few years. While shelters and other groups have been aware of "animal collectors" for years, it has been only recently that medical professionals have begun to look at the complex pathology that underlies hoarding. Some believe it is a form of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). The issue has obvious effects on the animals, but also on the families of the hoarders and the communities they live in.

There is a huge difference between the person who properly cares for a number of animals, either as personal companions or for rescue purposes, and an animal collector. Animal hoarding is defined by three important concepts:

- **Keeping more than the typical number of companion animals**
- **Inability to provide even minimal standards of nutrition, sanitation, shelter and veterinary care, with this neglect often resulting in starvation, illness, and death;**
- **Denial of the inability to provide**

***this minimum care and the impact of that failure on the animals, the household, and human occupants of the dwelling.***

The most noticeable feature is the last one; in almost every animal hoarding case, the hoarder has insisted that they take excellent care of their animals, and/or that they love them more or better than anyone else could. This often occurs amidst mind-numbing evidence to the contrary.

Oregon has made the news more than once in relation to the issue. In 2003 more than 562 neglected dogs were found on a rural property in Oregon. The sad reality is that for every case that is discovered and dealt with, there are many more that go on unnoticed. The difficulty is that from the law enforcement perspective, most municipalities do not have a way of handling the issue, other than to write a citation for every animal involved. In the court this often breaks down in the plea-bargaining process to result in a light sentence that doesn't address the negative impact the situation has on the animals, or the organizations left to deal with the mess.

But more troublesome is that a key element of animal hoarding is that the people involved don't recognize the problem. Jail time, fees and penalties do little to stop the real problem, for hoarders are often repeat offenders that, as we have seen locally, will go to great lengths and do what seem to be positively outlandish things to continue the very behavior that has landed them with fees, charges, convictions and even jail time. Our judicial system is struggling with the fact that animal hoarding is not the result of bad choices or inherent evil, but rather a serious mental illness in which the individuals affected have lost touch with reality.

The State of Illinois in 2001 was the first to pass a state law specifically addressing animal hoarding. The state's legislation defined animal hoarding, including the emphasis that the hoarder does not

# ***Shop dropping' leaves messages, art and animals behind***

By Sara DeLuca

In a culture of consumerism, it is not surprising that “shop dropping” has become a new phenomenon. Shop droppers are the opposite of shop lifters.

Shop droppers use the vehicle of consumer items to promote a particular message or to leave products behind. They secretly return purchased and subtly altered merchandise to stores, or place their own products or messages on store shelves. They put new labels with political messages on soda bottles and return them to the shelves in grocery stores, and they leave messages inside of egg cartons. They hang their art in art galleries among the featured pieces. They put their own self-published books on the shelves of book stores. Artists, entrepreneurs, and activists have found it an effective guerilla marketing technique. Shop dropping raises some security and safety concerns, mainly regarding food and children’s items.

In the case of leaving animals behind, however, it is simply another form of animal abandonment.

The New York Times and The Oregonian (12/24/07) cited examples of pet stores experiencing shop dropping in the form of buyers who regret their purchase and dump animals at the store, virtually leaving them to roam the aisles. The New York Times reported the experiences from national pet products chain Petco. “After Easter, there’s a wave of bunnies; after Halloween, it’s black cats; after Christmas, it’s puppies,” said Don Cowan, a spokesman for the store chain Petco. In the month after each of those holidays, the Petco chain sees 100 to 150 pets abandoned in its aisles or left after hours in cages in front of



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stores. Snakes have been left in crates, mice and hamsters surreptitiously dropped in dry aquariums, even a donkey left behind after a store’s annual pet talent show, Cowan said.

Locally, the Oregon Humane Society (OHS) sometimes finds animals left in front of the facility during off hours. However, these animals usually were

not originally obtained from OHS. Regardless of their origin, David Lytle of OHS maintains that these are simply cases of animal abandonment which OHS will prosecute to the best of their ability.

Local pet store chains report few instances of abandoned pets. Both Petco and PetSmart note they have infrequently found boxes of kittens outside the store but no instances of pets left in store aisles to be found later by store personnel.

*Note: Connie Kenney contributed to this article.*

## **bunny based business** *continued from page 1*

*Janeen was shocked to learn through her involvement with RA that people who foster animals get no financial support from anyone.*

### **Bunny Universe ([www.BunnyUniverse.com](http://www.BunnyUniverse.com))**

Janeen Hammers' business, Bunny Universe, is a local source of discounted pet supplies for people who foster or adopt house rabbits in the Portland/Vancouver area. At the same time, it is an internet presence with a message about pet adoption and spay/neuter that has found its way around the world.

Janeen first got the idea for Bunny Universe in 2004, shortly after she moved from the Seattle area to Vancouver, and it was the Rabbit Advocates group that inspired her to start the business. Her original pair of bunnies, both adopted from the Humane Society of Bellevue, Washington, had recently passed away within months of each other, and she was looking for "a bunny or two" to adopt. An internet search led her to the Rabbit Advocates website, which led her to RA Valerie Madison, from whom she adopted the first two of her five RA bunnies (she also adopted two bunnies from the Hillsboro rescue).

Over the next year, Janeen became more involved with the Rabbit Advocates, and even took in two foster rabbits. She ultimately kept the bunnies and realized that she wanted to find a way to help others who were fostering rabbits.

Janeen says that one thing she was shocked to learn through her involvement with the Rabbit Advocates is that "people who foster animals get no financial support from anyone. I had just assumed that fostering animals was similar to fostering children and that some animal organization or government was contributing or reimbursing expenses for animal care. That is not the case, at least not with most small rescue groups, of which there are thousands across the country." She decided to look into setting up a small business to provide food and supplies to fosterers at a discount rate.

Setting up the business was not too difficult for Janeen, who already had small business experience. Her full-time job is running a Seattle-area business that she and her brother started in 1990, doing bathtub and tile refinishing. Janeen does



all of the office work, including bookkeeping, phones, and scheduling, from her home office in Vancouver, while her brother, Darrell, and their one employee, Kirk, do the actual work up in Seattle. Because of this experience, it was relatively easy for Janeen to go through the required processes and file the paperwork necessary to start Bunny Universe. Still, it did take several months of researching and planning for her to get started. She officially started the business in January 2006.

Bunny Universe is unique in that it was established as a service to the local foster and rescue community rather than as a money-making business. As a result, Bunny Universe is able to offer lower prices on supplies than other local businesses can offer. These prices are only available, however, to those who foster or adopt through Rabbit Advocates.

Janeen sees the main purpose of Bunny Universe as promoting adoption of homeless animals and advocating for spaying and neutering all pets. Having witnessed a large number of abandoned cats in the Hazel Dell area of Vancouver, where she lives, Janeen has also become involved with helping stray and feral cats. She says that she is now "quite passionate about educating others" about the huge problem of pet abandonment.

To get the message out to the public, Janeen worked with her brother-in-law, Dennis Clevenger, who is a graphic artist, to create an eye-catching graphic for the slogan "Don't buy and don't breed, ADOPT a homeless pet in need!" T-shirts, bumper stickers, and other items with the graphic are available for purchase on the Bunny Universe website. Janeen is proud to say that over the past couple of years, she has sold bumper stickers with her slogan to people all over the world. She hopes that it gets people talking about adopting pets. "Hopefully, if enough people keep talking about adoption, including big names like Ellen and Oprah who speak to millions of people, maybe someday animal abandonment will be a thing of the past."

*Photo on page 1 provided by Amy and Scott Leith.*

### **Rabbit Rescuer**

Sheila David and Erik Bakkom  
Rebecca Kirk and Byron DeLuca  
Leann Bleakney  
April Surman-Oliger, in memory of Anni

### **Rabbit Sponsor**

Shannon McLean  
Karen and Pat Stelter  
Keith and Elizabeth Olson  
Kevin and Sarah Yasutake  
Julia Heydon  
Emily Stuparyk, in loving memory of dear little Suzy-Bear rabbit  
Valda Wold  
Kendal and Daniel McDonald in memory of Winnie and Bandit  
Carole and Marvin Peters

### **Rabbit Friend**

Helen Olson, in memory of Petunia  
Benjamin Busse  
Shari and Dennis Clevenger  
Bob and Marie Sherman  
Kent Wiles  
Ruby Schouten  
Kenneth and Penny Dillon  
Julie Eddy  
Susan and Mark Rice  
Poh Hock Leng and Yen P Ho  
Heidi Harvey and Craig Roethler  
Joann Myers  
Amy Saindon and Karla Saindon-Hayes  
Shannon and Michael Rinck, in memory of Bunny John and Byrnace Ristow  
Teresa and David Cornelius

Donations received after Aug. 1, 2008 will be acknowledged in the next newsletter.

***Would you like to continue receiving our newsletter, or update your mailing address? Or maybe make a comment or suggestion?***

***WRITE TO US AT:***  
***newsletter@adoptrabbit.org***

# Your bunny, immortalized in art

Your bunny Mona could be your own personal Mona Lisa, featured in an oil painting and hanging over the fireplace mantle. Local Portland artist and Rabbit Advocate volunteer Lorraine Bushek has chosen rabbits as one of the subjects for her paintings. Lorraine's series of paintings "Rabbits on Chairs" includes her own rabbits Billy Bob and Eloise as well as others' rabbits like volunteers Bob and Marie Sherman's Penny.

Lorraine's paintings are shown at the Broderick Gallery in downtown Portland. She was also chosen Best in Show at the Oregon Society of Artists' spring, 2008, show.

Lorraine has generously donated a "sitting" of a rabbit or bonded pair of rabbits and the completed painting. The Rabbit Advocates will hold an auction of this sitting at its November meeting. The auction will be held November 23 during the general meeting which

begins at 3:30 p.m. at the Oregon Humane Society's Manner Hall. The society is located at 1067 NE Columbia Blvd.

The auction is open to the public and Rabbit Advocates invite anyone interested to attend this special meeting. Bidding for the sitting and painting will begin at \$50. For more information about Lorraine's "Rabbits on Chairs," visit her web site at

<http://lorrainebushekstudio.blogspot.com>

All proceeds will benefit the Rabbit Advocates.



## **RA Board of Directors**

**President** Helen Swann

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Arlene MacMonagle

## **The Rabbit Advocate**

**The Rabbit Advocate is published three times a year.**

**Editor** Leann Bleakney

**Graphic Designer** Sandy Alto

**Photographer** Kem Sypher

**Writers:** Sarah Yasutake, Amy Leith-Young, Amy Roddey, Sara DeLuca, Jan Hutto and Elizabeth Olson

## **Letter to the Editor**

*Editor's note: This letter has been edited for brevity.*

Dear Rabbit Advocates,

I live in Central Oregon and am on your mailing list. Four years ago I rescued a wild cottontail and named her Lucky. The vets said she probably would not survive in captivity, but she quickly became an important and fun part of our family.

Last fall she started having seizures and rolling. I took her to my vet and he didn't know what was wrong with

her. I kept her warm and comfortable. Within two weeks your newsletter arrived with an article on head tilt. I took the article to my vet and we did more investigation on the internet. He prescribed ear drops every other day and within a short time she was almost back to her lovable self.

Your group provides a wonderful service and I am proud to support you any way I can.

# Local people win rabbit raves

*It's the phone call Rabbit Advocates dread. Domestic bunnies are loose in a park, golf course or empty lot, having been abandoned there by people who don't understand the sad consequences for the rabbits.*

But when neighbors step in to lend a hand, it reminds bunny rescuers that people are willing to help and that they care about what happens to these wonderful companion pets.

Over the summer, Rabbit Advocates rescued domestic rabbits from locations around the Portland area. They were aided by local people and businesses. The rabbits are all safe now, and have been spayed and neutered and await their forever homes.

Special rabbit raves go to the following people and businesses:

Debbie Stickel, who set traps to help

catch two rabbits in Lake Oswego.

She contributed money to the rescue, including the spaying of sister buns, who have since been adopted.

Healthy Pet, including staff person Sadie, which took in four angora rabbits rescued in Lake Oswego.

McMenamin Brothers staff allowed Rabbit Advocates onto a pub's property to help catch five bunnies. All six are safe now.

To adopt or foster one of these rabbits go to [www.adoptarabbit.org](http://www.adoptarabbit.org).

## Animal hoarding

*continued from page 3*

recognize the problem, increased penalties for the offense, and included a recommendation for psychiatric help for offenders. Without treatment, the recidivism rate for offenders is 100 percent. Some states are following that lead, proposing laws that address this issue directly, or modify existing animal cruelty laws.

Oregon's reaction to the cases it has handled has received positive press because in part it includes a well-crafted probation with specific limitations and monitoring. All that will likely be for naught, however, without appropriate psychiatric treatment. Doing that within our current system of law is very difficult. Prison time does not serve the purpose of treatment.

Dealing with animal hoarding is particularly difficult for a rescue group. It taxes available resources, uncovers differences and tensions between municipal groups with moderate aims versus the more idealistic vision of the special

*Oregon's reaction to the cases it has handled has received positive press because in part it includes a well-crafted probation with specific limitations and monitoring.*

interest group, and creates an emotional firestorm between good-hearted, sensitive animal lovers and someone who is quite literally mentally ill.

As with all rescue activities, one has to remain realistic but optimistic, recognizing that the problem is bigger than all of us put together, but that by being there for the animals we are doing a huge part to make the world a better place.

## Thank You to Our Vets!

*We gratefully acknowledge the generosity of the following veterinarians and staffs for their services to our rescued rabbits:*

**Dr. Chris Wilson  
Dr. Katrina Ramsell,  
Beaverton Pet Clinic**

**Dr. Mark Burgess,  
Southwest Animal Hospital  
Beaverton**

**Dr. Melinda Surrency  
Southwest Animal Hospital  
Beaverton**

**Dr. Ken DeReamer  
Paws and Claws Pet Medical Center  
Troutdale**

**Dr. Ross Weinstein  
North Portland Veterinary Hospital  
Portland**

**Dr. Mary Blankenvoort  
St. Johns Veterinary Clinic  
Portland**

**Dr. Peter Davis  
St. Johns Veterinary Clinic  
Portland**

**Dr. Rebecca Prull  
Dogwood Pet Hospital  
Gresham**

**Dr. Sheri Schlorman  
Creswell Veterinary Hospital  
Creswell**

**Dr. Matt Fricke  
McKenzie Animal Hospital  
Springfield**

*We'd love to add more names to this list!  
Please call us at 503- 617-1625 if you are  
a rabbit-savvy vet who is able to donate  
services to help rescued rabbits.*

# Upcoming Meetings & Events

*Rabbit Advocates monthly meetings are held at the Oregon Humane Society, 1067 NE Columbia Blvd., the third Sunday of each month from 3:30-5:30 p.m. Meetings include a "bunny basics" question and answer session on bunny behavior and care. The public is welcome. Please park in the gravel parking lot just west of the shelter building.*

## General Meeting Dates

*September 21, Education Room 3:30-5:30*

*October 19, Education Room 3:30-5:30*

*November 23, Manners Hall 3:30-5:30*

## Adoption Outreaches

*Each month, Rabbit Advocates showcase foster rabbits available for adoption. Adoption outreaches are held at Western Pet Supply, 6908 SW Beaverton-Hillsdale Highway. Volunteers are also on hand to provide grooming and nail trimming services. A donation is appreciated for this service. Adoption outreaches are held the second Saturday of each month from noon-3 p.m.*

## Adoption Outreach Dates

*September 13    October 11*

*November 8    December 13*

## Bunny's Best Bites

*Volunteers blend and bag different types of hay to create Bunny's Best Bites, our own custom blend of hay. For more information about the hay parties, contact volunteer Jan at [jhhutto2@msn.com](mailto:jhhutto2@msn.com)*

### *Bunny's Best Bites parties*

*September 27, 10 a.m.*

*October 25, 10 a.m.*

*November 22, 10 a.m.*

*December 20, 10 a.m.*



[www.rabbitadvocates.org](http://www.rabbitadvocates.org)



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**Oregon**

**97293-0235**

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**[www.adoptarabbit.org](http://www.adoptarabbit.org)**

**"Promoting  
the Welfare of  
Domestic Rabbits"**

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