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PET DISH: Have an estate plan in case pets outlive you

By [Sandra Eckstein](#)

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Adrienne Kimler of Marietta loved her dogs, cats and birds.

But unfortunately for her pets, when the single, retired doctor died unexpectedly last year at age 59, she'd made no provisions in her will to care for her pets. Instead, her elderly mother was left to find them homes.

"If more estate planning attorneys knew you could set up trusts for pets, it could take care of so many problems," said Kristen Lewis, an Atlanta attorney with Smith, Gambrell & Russell. "But so many estate planning attorneys just think it's a joke."

Lewis, who has set up a number of trusts for people and their pets, said she's had clients from as far away as South Georgia who want to be sure their pets will be cared for if they pass. Ensuring that can be as simple as including a few paragraphs in your will, or as complicated as an administered trust.

The easiest, but least secure way, is to name a caretaker for pets and leave that person a set sum of money in your will. But legal professionals point out that naming a caretaker is not a binding obligation — the guardian could keep the money and dump the pet.

The only way people can be sure their pets will get the care they are paying for is to set up a trust. Georgia is one of only 11 states that do not have pet trust statutes, which make it easier to establish such trusts, but it can still be done.

Lewis said people need to determine how much money it will cost to care for their pets for the rest of their lives. Then they must choose a guardian and a trustee, as well as a backup for each. The guardian will care for the pets and the trustee will dole out the money, forming a checks and balance system.

While only a handful of attorneys in the state set up pet trusts, it's a trend that's growing. Tricia Clements, a legal assistant with the firm of Lane & Karlo of Atlanta, said most of the people in her firm have pets, so they decided to research how to set up pet trusts for themselves. Now they are offering the service to the public, and even have an online site dealing with the topic, [www.GaPetTrust.com](#).

"For an attorney to do all the back work, it could run into several thousand dollars," Clements said. "But with that work done, it won't cost as much."

Clements and Lewis said setting up a trust should run \$500 to \$1,000, depending on complexity. But one like

Lewis did for a Buckhead couple cost much more.

"This couple lives near the Governor's Mansion, and they wanted to be sure their pets weren't uprooted from their home," Lewis said. "So their trust includes money not just for their pets' care, but for the upkeep of the home and a caretaker so the pets can live out the rest of their lives in the home. This is a house valued at \$2 [million] to \$3 million."

Trusts also can be written so they kick in if the owner is incapacitated, and not just when they die. That's important if someone is injured and faces a long recovery. Experts recommend carrying a card in your wallet with the name and phone number of your pet's guardian.

Kimler, whose dogs were with her when she fell ill, had no arrangements. Her cats and birds found homes, but her dogs sat in a boarding facility for five months until Kimler's mother made the painful decision to put them down. A rescuer, Maryann Liotta, heard about the dogs — Cainin, a chow, and Franz, a Rottweiler mix — and got them into a foster home. Then Man's Best Friend in Norcross offered to train them. They recently graduated from obedience classes and are ready for adoption.

"Adrienne was very devoted to all of her animals, but she never thought they'd outlive her," Liotta said.

Information on Franz or Cainin: 404-401-2327, 404-320-9822 or www.potcake.org. Information on wills: estateplanningforpets.org, humanesociety.org/petsinwills.

Kitty yard sale

Help RescueCats, an adoption group, by shopping its yard sale Friday and Saturday (furniture, artwork, toys, books). 8 a.m.-3 p.m., 105 Hamilton Glen Court, Fayetteville. Information: www.rescuecats.org.

Walkies

The Fabulous Doggie Dash, a 5K or 1-mile walk benefiting the Georgia Heartland Humane Society, kicks off at 10:30 a.m. Saturday. Awards for top fund-raisers and door prizes. Shakerag Park, 191 McIntosh Trail, Peachtree City. 770-830-2820, www.gaheartland.com. Then head to the Stray Pet Strut, a fund-raiser for the Humane Society of Hall County, April 13. The 5K run and 1-mile walk start at 2 p.m. at a pavilion at Lake Lanier Islands, 7000 Holiday Road, Buford. Pre-registration is \$20, \$25 day of event. Leashed, vaccinated pets welcome. Information: 770-532-6617, www.humanesocietyhallcounty.com.

Dog show

The Peach Blossom Cluster Thursday-April 13 in Perry is billed as the largest dog show in the Southeast. The first three days are all-breed conformation shows, with breed-specific shows April 13. 8 a.m.-6:30 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, 8 a.m.-1 p.m. April 13. Free. Georgia National Fairgrounds, 401 Larry Walker Parkway. Information: www.peach-blossom.org.

QUICK TIP

Pets have allergies just like people. If your pet is scratching a lot or getting hot spots, see your vet. It could be spring allergies.

NEWS TO SHARE?

Know of pet news, events or stories? Tell Sandra Eckstein at seckstein@ajc.com or call 404-526-7260. For more pet news, go to ajcpets.com.

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