

## Protect your pets when you can no longer do it

*"In a cat's eye, all things belong to cats." – English proverb*

*"If dogs could talk, it would take a lot of the fun out of owning one." – Andy Rooney.*

In our society today, so many of us live with and care for our pets. Whether they be cats or dogs, our pets have become part of our family. People take their pets with them on vacations or else have in-home pet sitting to make sure their pet is doing well while they are gone. Many Naperville dogs are dressed with stylish sweaters, and some of the smaller dogs may be seeing the sights of Naperville in a dog stroller.

You personally may not be the type of person who would walk your dog in a stroller, but most people are very concerned, in the event of their disability or their death, about what happens to their pets. Who will care for their pets? How can they make sure that their pets are properly cared for and that those who will be responsible will have the funds to do that?

One of the new concepts in the estate-planning area is that of pet trusts. Pet trusts are allowed under the law in 28 states, including Illinois. You can set up a trust for the care of one or more designated domestic or pet animals. The trust will terminate when there is no living animal covered by the trust. Although many states allow the pet owner to leave any amount they wish to the pet trust, the Illinois law states that the court may reduce the amount of funds or property held in the trust if it substantially exceeds the amount required for the intended use of the funds.

You can use this trust to ensure that certain people are notified if you are disabled or upon your death so that your pet's care will be uninterrupted. You can preselect what caretakers you would like to provide this pet care. The trust will state your wishes for the care of your pet, including your likes and dislikes, routines, care instructions and wishes regarding burial or cremation. The trust will be funded with an amount of money to cover these costs. The Illinois law exempts the trustee from filing any reports or accounting for the funds.

Normally, the trustee is a different person than the caretaker, as the trustee will need to pass along the balance of the funds left in the trust to another beneficiary of the pet owner as set forth in the trust, or, if none, the funds will be distributed to the heirs of the estate. Instead of leaving the balance of the trust to your heirs, this may be the time for you to be a "hero" for the less-fortunate pets by leaving the balance to a quality organization such as the Naperville Area Humane Society.

Your pets and all the pets that come through the humane societies will thank you.

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