

History of Niles Animal Hospital

Niles Animal Hospital has a long and distinguished history, being recognized as one of the foremost veterinary practices in the nation. The hospital was established by Dr. T. J. Lafeber, Jr. who was considered one of the world's leading authorities on pet bird care and medicine.

After Dr. Lafeber graduated from Iowa State College of Veterinary Medicine in 1949, he opened Niles Animal Hospital. His small animal practice was extremely successful catering to dogs, cats and birds. In 1953, Niles Animal Hospital achieved accreditation from the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) and has remained accredited since then (see the article describing accreditation on this web site). In 1960, Dr. Lafeber was made chairman of the AAHA Committee on Avian Medicine. He performed in depth studies on the problems and diseases of pet birds as well as the proper methods of maintaining them as pets. His success in the field was confirmed by his large following of private bird owners, pet stores, aviculturists and breeders.

Dr. Lafeber was a noted speaker at national, state and local veterinary association meetings, the World Veterinary Medical Association and Society of Laboratory Animal Medicine. In 1974, he received a special award from AAHA in recognition of contributions in the field of Avian Medicine and Clinical Laboratory Medicine. He was a pioneer the establishment of an in-house diagnostic lab set up in a small animal practice, which Niles still prides itself on having to this day. This enables us to quickly generate laboratory results for critically ill patients so appropriate treatment can be instituted immediately. In 1975, Dr. Lafeber was named by AAHA Region III as the Outstanding Practitioner of the year. He has won many other awards throughout his distinguished career.

Dr. Lafeber authored *Tender Loving Care for Pet Birds*, in 1977, a book which gave concerned bird owners a source of accurate, proven essential facts so that birds could live happy and healthy lives, be a joy to their owners and be acknowledged as one of nature's loveliest creatures.

Around this time, Dr. Lafeber began developing a product line of innovative bird diets, pellets, and other supplements, including a multi-vitamin. He also developed hand feeding formulas for baby birds and nutritional formulas that could be administered to hospitalized pet birds, Emerald I and II. His company was named Dorothy Products and it originated in the back portion of Niles Animal Hospital. Over time these products have changed names and the product line vastly expanded to include many groundbreaking nutritious diets and supplements. Dr. Lafeber was one of the pioneers in the development of pelleted diets for pet birds. Popular products also include Nutriberries and Avicakes, combinations of seeds and pellets, which are much more nutritious than plain seed diets. His humble little company which started out in the back of the hospital has become quite successful nationally, is now called Lafeber Company and is run by his son, Dr. T. J. Lafeber III.

In the summer of 1980, a student extern from the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine named Peter Sakas began a summer job at Niles Animal Hospital (which has ended up lasting thirty years and counting!) Dr. Lafeber served as his mentor and encouraged him to get involved in avian practice. At that time Peter was being encouraged by the Veterinary College to pursue a dual DVM/PhD due to his graduate studies on heartworm disease in dogs and cats. However, Dr. Lafeber recognized that Peter belonged in a practice setting and began grooming him to potentially be his successor. He worked at Niles whenever he was on break from College through his years in veterinary school. Dr. Sakas became a staff veterinarian upon graduation in 1983. Things continued to go well and Dr. Lafeber wanted to concentrate on Lafeber Company so he retired in 1985 and Dr. Sakas bought the practice, owning it ever since. Sadly Dr. Lafeber passed away in 2001, however, his legacy lives on at Niles Animal Hospital with his protégée, Dr. Sakas and at Lafeber Company with his son.

Dr. Sakas has continued on in a similar fashion as Dr. Lafeber, becoming a noted author and speaker (see his biography under our staff section). Niles continues to have an outstanding in-house laboratory, having the capabilities to perform blood counts, blood chemistries, coagulation panels, certain endocrine tests, fecal examinations, urinalyses, certain serological tests and also utilize digital radiography. These tools enable us to have excellent diagnostic capabilities.

Niles Animal Hospital has been recognized by *Town and Country Magazine* in July 1997 as being excellent in an article rating veterinary hospitals. Niles was also the featured practice in *Trends Magazine* (published by AAHA) in 1991. Dr. Sakas was recognized as one of the best avian veterinarians in Chicagoland in an article rating veterinarians in *Chicago Magazine*. In addition, Dr. Sakas was named one of the nation's best veterinarians in 2007 by the *Consumer's Research Council of America*. Another distinction, Niles Animal Hospital was named one of the "Best Vets for Your Pets" in the Summer/Fall issue of *Chicago Consumer's Checkbook*. In 2011, Niles Animal Hospital was awarded the *CMUS (Celebration Media U.S.) Talk of the Town Award for Excellence in Customer Satisfaction*. We were also recognized in 2011 by *Angie's List* for excellence in customer satisfaction.

Niles has been featured in various public service announcements and educational videos. In fact, a former Miss America, Dr. Debbye Turner (a veterinarian) filmed a promotional video for the American Veterinary Medical Association at Niles Animal Hospital in December 1991. A case from the hospital, featuring Dr. Kostuch, was on an episode of the television show, "*My Dog Ate What?*" Recently, Niles Animal Hospital, Dr. Sakas, Dr. Staunton, some of our clients and their pets were featured in some instructional videos about pet care produced by the American Veterinary Medical Association. There are other awards and distinctions Niles Animal Hospital has achieved through the years.

Niles Animal Hospital continues the tradition of excellence established by Dr. Lafeber so many years ago. We have an outstanding, well-trained and compassionate staff. We have one employee that has been here for over forty years (and was responsible for hiring Dr. Sakas when he was a veterinary student in 1980). We have five other staff members that

have been here for twenty plus years. That is why you will see some very familiar faces. We have treated the pets of several generations of families with quality medical care, compassion and sensitivity. We truly appreciate your confidence in us and will always strive to provide the best for your beloved pets.