

# deltona FORUM

Saturday, January 28, 2006

Also Serving DeBary/Orange City

VOL. 1. NO. 17

## Deltona dog wins national title

The Pekingese will compete internationally after winning best of breed at AKC contest

By Andy Hall

Special Correspondent

At younger than 2 years old, Bradley was already a veteran performer.

Now, Bradley is a national champion.

Bradley—whose official name is American Champion Deja vu Pekehuis Gold Fusion—is a Pekingese dog, bred by Susan Shephard of Deltona and Winifred Mee of England.

Earlier this month, Bradley won his most prestigious

title yet: "Best of Breed" and "Best Bred by Exhibitor" at the AKC/Eukanuba National Championship dog show in Tampa, which was nationally televised by cable channels Animal Planet and the Discovery Channel. More than 2,600 dogs from 50 states and 20 countries competed in the invitation-only event.

Bradley was the youngest Pekingese exhibited at the show.

His win earned \$400, the only prize money he has

earned since Shephard began showing him. "It's very unusual for a dog show to give prize money. Usually, you get your ribbon, and that is it," she said.

The Eukanuba show was Bradley's debut as a "special," which meant he was already a champion, competing for best of breed. To qualify for the show, he had to have completed his championship in the bred-by-exhibitor class by mid-October of last year.

Now, with national titles

in paw, Bradley is taking his title crusade overseas.

Next year, Bradley will compete in the prestigious Crufts Dog Show in Birmingham, England. He will leave for England in February, where he will remain for a year with Mee in preparation for the 2007 show. Shephard plans to travel to England in March to show Bradley at the Pekingese Club Show in London.

An advertising executive who works in Orlando, Please See **CHAMPION**, page 10



COURTESY OF SUSAN SHEPHARD

The Pekingese dog, with owner Susan Shephard, took high honors at a Greater Gainesville Dog Fanciers Association show in October.

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## Deltona dog will travel to England

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Shephard has been breeding and showing champion Pekingese for the past 11 years. Her dogs have won many awards in Florida and around the country.

As long as she can remember, Shephard has loved Pekingese dogs. She knew that part of her calling in life was to work with the diminutive breed.

"I'm not sure if it's a hobby or an obsession, because there's a fine line between the two," she said.

Shephard's love of the breed goes back to her childhood, when her grandmother had a Pekingese.

"I was just consumed with them," she said. "I thought they were elegant and fabulous, and why would anybody want any other dog?"

But Shephard was never allowed to have a Pekingese of her own, because her father and brother hunted and had lots of hunting dogs around.

"They would have eaten a Pekingese," Shephard said. "When we'd visit my grandmother, my father would always say, 'Enjoy them now, because we're never going to have a Pekingese at our house.'"



FILE PHOTO COURTESY OF SUSAN SHEPHARD

Bradley was the youngest Pekingese exhibited at the AKC/Eukanuba National Championship in Tampa earlier this month.

So after marrying and having her daughter, Shephard got her first Pekingese, which came from a pet shop. She decided to get serious about raising them after attending a dog show in Memphis and seeing a beautiful specimen in the show ring.

With some research, Shephard found a breeder in Panama City and got a puppy. Later, Shephard came across a breeder in St. Petersburg who was retiring, contacted her and got her first Peke bitch puppy.

That dog, now 11 and still part of the Shephard household, became her first champion.

Meanwhile, the retiring St. Petersburg breeder, who had about 40 years of breeding experience with Pekingese, became Shephard's mentor. With the woman's enthusiastic approval, Shephard mated her dog with a descendent of the dog she had seen in Memphis, and an offspring became her second champion.

In a typical year, Shephard attends 50 shows on 25 weekends, with 80 percent of her traveling confined to Florida.

"Central Florida is a great place to live if you want to show dogs," she said.

Shephard travels every year to the national show. Every other year, she goes to Crufts, where, in the past, she has shown other people's dogs.

Although Shephard declined to say how much she spends on her traveling and showing, she said, "I do this for the love of the sport and the love of the Pekingese breed."

Her husband, Ken, a certified public accountant in DeLand, doesn't travel to the shows but performs a valuable service.

"He doesn't like the shows, but he loves the dogs. He does a great job of taking care of them when I'm away," Shephard said. "Someone gave him a T-shirt that said 'Unpaid Kennel Help,' and he wears it with pride."