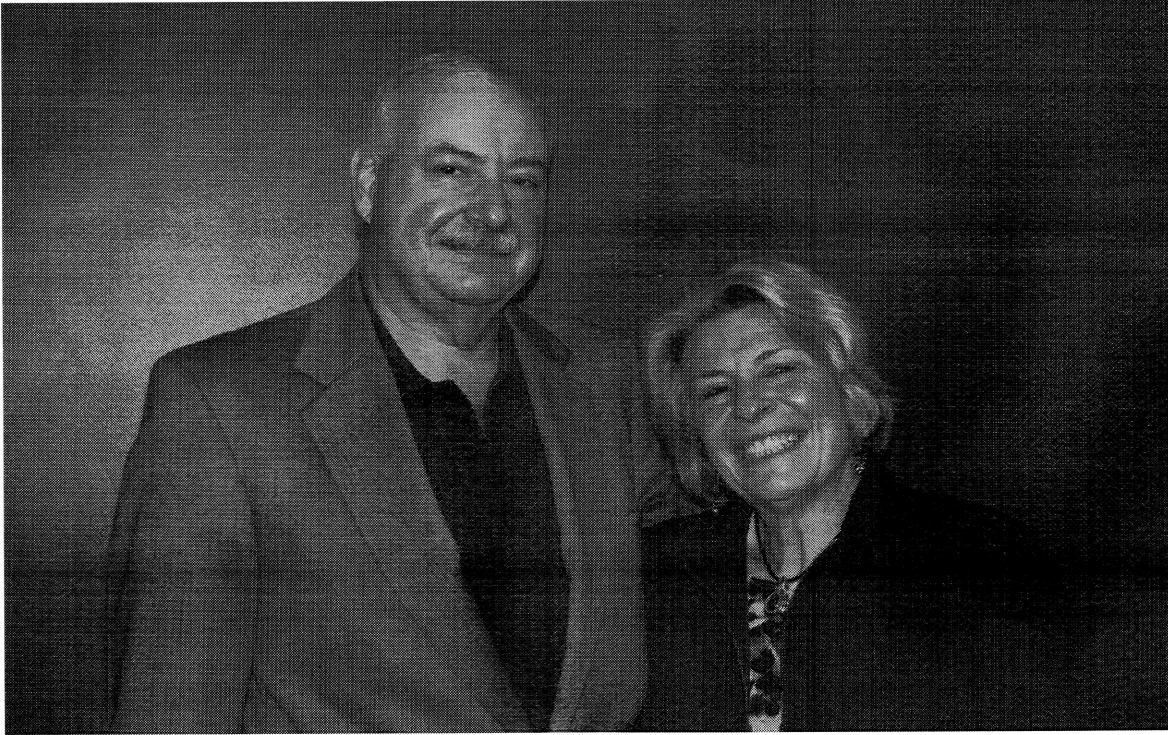


Introducing our 2018 July Championship show Judges



CHESAPEAKE - It's been more than 40 years since Liz and Al Bianchi acquired their first dog as a couple. A lot has transpired since then in their love for the canine world. Today, the Bianchis, who reside in Woodards Mill, will be at the Westminster Kennel Club dog show in New York City as breed judges of the prestigious event. (2014). Al will judge 105 dogs in the herding breeds and varieties category, including Australian cattle dogs, Australian shepherds, border collies, Entlebucher mountain dogs, Pyrenean shepherds and Shetland sheepdogs, while Liz will judge 22 smooth and rough varieties of collies.

"It's one of the highest honors a dog show judge can achieve," Al said. The Bianchis are among the 44 judges selected from 20 states, Canada and Ireland for the 138th annual dog show. Westminster Kennel Club is a benched show, one of the few in the country, which means interaction of dogs and their owners with spectators, other owners and breeders for educational purposes. "It's a tremendous general public spectator event," said Liz, who showed a dog there in 1987. "It's quite an adventure."

The Bianchis have owned the Fossil Rock Inn, a local restaurant at 1464 Mount Pleasant Road, since 2007. Previously they owned and operated Dominion Kennels, a now-defunct business. When Brandy, their first Sheltie of many, entered their lives, they heard people talk about showing, and it piqued their interest. They spent the next seven years learning about show dogs, educating themselves, attending shows and meeting industry people. In 1980, they purchased a dog, Nova, to show. With shows 50 weekends each year, around the country, there are plenty of opportunities to participate, they said. The Bianchis have had at least 20 dogs, all Shelties, throughout the years, who were finished champions. After 2005, they slowed down on their showing, and the following year Liz completed her judging license. They are both members of the Tidewater Kennel Club and the American Shetland Sheepdog Association. Liz is a member of the Chesapeake Virginia Dog Fancier's Association and an officer in the National American Shetland Sheepdog Association; Al is its past president and has held his judging license since 1990. The pair explained that, through the American Kennel Club, one must demonstrate experience in the breed and be successful, with at least 10 years of involvement before an application to judge is even entertained. Additionally, educational requirements must be met, which includes attending seminars on anatomy, gait and motion, history of breeds, and their form and function. According to Al, there are dogs available for hands-on instruction.

Al is licensed to judge more than 70 breeds, while Liz has four under her belt. Their dual assignment to Westminster is their first, they said. "We received our letter of invitation a year ago, before Westminster last year," said Liz, adding they were not permitted to share their good news until recently.

"These are the best of the best," Liz said. "We're excited to find the breed winner who will go to the competition group and maybe go to win best of show."