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FOX HUNTING IN ILLINOIS

WITH DR. JAMES KANE

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When Dr. James Kane and his wife Gloria want to get away from it#!!, they don't have far to go. They just wa!k out their patio door to the land of Connemara Fa####. Connemara Farm# is on!y minutes away from Dr. Kane's office in Mt. Prospect, Illinois, and the t##e# hospitals where he has surgical privi!eges. Yet these 80 acres of rolling and wooded countryside seem a wor!d apart from the busy expressways and housing deve!opments that now encroach upon it. Ignore such evidence of

metropolitan development by savoring the view of the green fields with brown rail fencing surrounding the horse stables and their private riding course.

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Here is where the Kanes raised four children to love family, medicine, and horses. Mary, a gastroenterologist, is married to Eric Kerchburger, also an internist. Elizabeth and her husband, Steven Shandley, have a joint dental practice. Jim is a surgical resident at Cook County Hospital, Chicago. Patricia is an electrical engineer with an interest in medical instrumentation.

Though the children are grown they have not altogether left Connemara Farm. Their boots and saddles are lined up in the tack room. Their horses wait in the stables. There is still time to do what they like to do best, especially in the fall when the fox hunting season starts.

Dr. Kane is the Field Master of the Oakbrook Hounds, one of the six Hunts in Illinois. Three times a week during the hunting season he will make the 140 mile round trip to the farm where they hunt south of Rockford, Illinois. There, one hundred miles west of Chicago, the shadows of the twin cooling towers of Commonwealth Edison's Byron Nuclear Reactor power plant fall on a scene straight out of the Eighteenth century: the hunters are riding to the hounds!

The fox is not just a pretty animal with a big bushy tail. It slaughters poultry and lambs and can be a real menace to nearby farmers. Fox hunting was an economic necessity in rural areas before the invention of the gun because horses and hounds were the only way to catch and destroy foxes.

But history has always recorded the thrill of the chase.

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Prehistoric artists scratched pictures of horses and hounds on cave walls. Genesis chapter 10 says that Nimrod "was a mighty hunter before the Lord". The Greek Xenophon in 400 B.C. described the attributes of a good hound. Kings and knights combined war with hunting during the Crusades by taking their falcons and hounds with them to the Holy Land.

Foxhound packs have existed in America as long as in England, from about 1690 on. George Washington was such a hunting enthusiast that almost every page in his diary contains some reference to hunting. Supposedly, his first thought upon awakening was whether it would be a good day for hunting. Even on days when important events were scheduled, Washington would rise early so that he could ride and hunt first.

Dr. Kane deplores the myth that fox hunting is a sport only for the idle rich. "We have farmers, teachers, professional people - all kinds - in our group. If you can afford to keep a horse, you can get into fox hunting."

Unlike the purists who insist that hunters should "ride to hunt", today's Hunt member is more apt to "hunt to ride". Proponents say that fox hunting is an unselfish sport requiring personal discipline, courage, teamwork and physical fitness. What better way to mitigate stress than to get out in the country on a powerful horse with good friends and perhaps the promise of a tasty "stirrup cup" after the hunt is over?

Even if you are the kind of person who would always

cheer the fox, you might like hunting with the Oakbrook Hounds.

"We're happiest when the fox gets away," says Dr. Kane. "And that is most of the time. Because the dumbest, healthy fox is 50 times smarter than the smartest healthy hound. So there is no way we are going to catch a fox unless it is very old or sick,"

"What really grieves me," says Dr. Kane, "is to find fox traps that poachers have illegally set out in the fields. That is horribly painful and prolonged way for a fox to die."

A fox hunt is a finely choreographed event with rigid rules of etiquette and dress developed for rational reasons over the last several centuries.

The mounted Master of the Fox Hounds goes first with his hunting horn and his hounds. He may "cast" the hounds until they pick up the scent of a fox. He is assisted by the whippers-

##n, or simply the whips, who help him control the hounds and keep them on course.

The Field Master comes next and this is Dr. Kane's position. "I go over the fence first." He has to control the "Field#- the other riders and their mounts - so that they stay well back and not interfere with the work of the hounds. He must also know the territory so that he can choose the safest way for the Field to ride as they start off after the hounds.

Dr. Kane did not learn to ride until his children did. In fact, survival was the only thing on the mind of

William Kane, his grandfather, who left Ireland for Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, in 1870 during the great potato famine. Dr. Kane is also proud of his father, Michael Kane, who in the great American-

can tradition started work in the coal mines when he was eight. Yet he went on to become a Pennsylvania postmaster while raising two sons who became doctors and one daughter who became a painter.

A graduate of Loyola Medical School, Chicago, Dr. Kane was a surgical resident and attending physician at Cook County Hospital before he started his solo surgical practice in Mt. Prospect in 1960.

Even though he does a lot of colon and endocrine surgery, he may be best known for his work with the morbidly obese. He has done 1,194 gastroplasties so far, probably more than any other surgeon in Illinois. Because of this experience he has developed a modification of the usual gastric stapling procedure that involves vertical rather than horizontal stapling. This promotes a lasting weight loss and has a very low incidence of complications. "I sometimes put a permanent suture over the stapling line, locking the barn door twice, so to speak."

To describe his work he has appeared on talk shows, including the Phil Donahue Show, with Agnes Belushi, one of his better-known patients and the mother of the actors John and James Belushi.

These associations have sensitized him to the plight of the morbidly obese. "I have had these patients brought to me standing up in the back of a pick-up truck like a 700 lb cow going to market. After a person weighs two times his ideal weight, his chance of losing and maintaining a weight loss for five years is less than 4%. With this operation you can really change their

Similar compassion led Dr. Kane to buy Connemara Farm. "When our children's first horse went lame, we could not bear the thought of putting him down and we couldn't afford to continue his stable fees and still buy another horse. So I went looking for some affordable acreage. This area was all empty farmland then. Even so, I was afraid to tell Gloria when I bought the land - she might have asked me how I planned to pay for it! In fact, I ran out of gas right in front of the gate the first night I brought her out to see our farm. I didn't have enough money to fill up the gas tank."

As their children have grown, so has their interest in horses. They have now started a sideline business to breed thoroughbreds. But Dr. Kane still prefers to ride an Irish Hunter, part thoroughbred and part draft horse developed near his ancestral home in Ireland, for fox hunting.

"You can always make time for what you really want to do," according to Dr. Kane.

That is why he will always have time for family, medicine, and horses.

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