

## Stewart

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violations, helping to ensure the safety of our school children, pedestrians and drivers; reducing accidents and deaths' and, as an additional benefit, holding down the cost of auto-insurance premiums.

These cameras do not record who or what is inside the vehicle; therefore, arguments against these cameras on the basis of invasion of privacy are without merit.

Orange County's charter determines our governmental structure and sets forth how it must function.

A charter is the citizens' document; it does not take effect and cannot be amended without the consent of the voters. It is the document by which the citizens of Orange County have set up their county government. It stipulates the powers of county government and how each county agency is to operate.

The charter spells out the structure of county government, the powers and duties of county commissioners and the mayor and the powers of the Charter Review Commission, which is appointed every four years.

These appointees are responsible for studying the charter, gathering information from the public, and proposing amendments and revisions to the charter. The voters in Orange County can either approve or disapprove these recommendations on the ballot at the time of the presidential election.

I recently selected Sally Holmes from Avalon Park and Sharon Wilson from Pine Castle to serve on the Charter Review Commission. We are grateful to Sally and Sharon for the time and effort they are willing to devote to this duty, expected to last approximately 18 months.

One area they might analyze is the distribution of the districts, whether to add two more commissioners or to keep the current number and reassign population to account for recent growth.

Congratulations to these two individu-

## Neighborhood office hours

**March 8** at Lake Nona YMCA  
9055 NorthLake Parkway  
**March 22** at Fire Station #71  
4405 S. Goldenrod Road

als who were chosen for their knowledge and involvement in their communities and their understanding of the issues facing District 4 constituents. I am confident they will lead the Charter Review Commission in an exemplary manner!

For those of you wanting to give suggestions to the Charter Review Commission, e-mail Sally Holmes at [sallyj52@aol.com](mailto:sallyj52@aol.com) and Sharon Wilson at [saw.ocfl@earthlink.net](mailto:saw.ocfl@earthlink.net).

Through April 26, Parks and Recreation will accept applications for the Field of Dreams grant program. The grants provide funds to eligible volunteer organizations operating youth sports programs for the public.

Mandatory application workshops will be held March 1 and March 22 at the Barnett Park Recreation Building, 4801 W Colonial Dr. Sign up now. Call Andrew Merkserson at 407-836-6235.

Animal Services is in need of foster homes to help with kittens, puppies, dogs and cats that may need some extra care in nurturing environment. This is an opportunity for individuals or families who cannot have an animal full time to make a short-term commitment to help an animal in need. Call Debi Villella at 407-254-9159 or e-mail [debra.villella@ocfl.net](mailto:debra.villella@ocfl.net).

Animal Services is desperately in need of gently used but clean sheets, towels and blankets to help keep the dogs and cats warm and dry. And to be used in the clinic. Donated newspapers are needed.

Donations may be dropped off at Animal Services, 2769 Conroy Road (across from the Millenia Mall), 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday. Call Barbara Faris at 407-254-9150 or e-mail [barbara.faris@ocfl.net](mailto:barbara.faris@ocfl.net).

## Animal deaths

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would never knowingly or intentionally harm our beloved patients," the letter continued.

Attorney H. Kyle Fletcher has worked cases similar to this one before.

In Florida, he said, animal owners have more rights than in most states.

In some states a dog is considered property that can depreciate in value.

But in Florida a dog is considered an integral part of the family and, if plaintiffs can prove reckless disregard for the animal's health, they can receive emotional damages, Fletcher said.

Florida animal owners can also receive punitive damages, which can reach up to triple the awarded compensatory damages.

"This is one reason I do go after these cases," said Fletcher.

"A vet charges you like it's a member of the family. If my pediatrician screws up my kid, I can sue him for medical malpractice. But this vet talks to you and treats you like a member of the family. But when they screw up, they throw up their hands and say it's just a piece of property."

Ehrlich and Fumei now must prove that they loved the dog in order to make a strong case.

They quickly gathered receipts from doggie day care and his mountain of toys, as well as some expensive gifts like two Coach dog collars.

Fumei said she and her fiancé have had dogs in the past but Toby was different. He was even included in Ehrlich's marriage proposal.

Fumei said they were walking around Lake Eola when Ehrlich got down on one knee and extended his hand as well as Toby's paw and said, "Toby and I are asking you to marry me."

"We really can't explain it to anyone but he was special. He had such a special little soul," Fumei said.

"I would get sick and the little guy would stay curled up next to me. I would have rather been in a terrible accident with months of rehab than have this happen to Toby. Physical pain would be easier to take for me.

"I feel like I let him down. I keep thinking, 'What could I have done differently?'"

But Fumei admitted that nothing about Union Park Animal Hospital had ever made her nervous in the past.

In fact, when they first brought Toby to the facility, they filled out a questionnaire asking whether they felt Toby was more like a member of the family.

When they checked 'yes,' they were praised by the staff.

"It did make me feel more comfortable. When I moved to Tampa last year I changed all my doctors except my dentist and Toby's doctor. She's known him since he was a pup and she's very attentive."

Fumei said she will be much more careful when picking a veterinarian for any future pets.

"I would make sure to know their credentials, which school they went to. I would make sure I have a couple of references, what their emergency care is like, are they reachable," she said.

"Word of mouth is important. I think I'll try to talk to friends, research on the Internet.

"I hope this prevents any further tragedies and helps people to look into who their vet is."

Until the couple decides whether to go through with a lawsuit, Fumei said their wedding will go on the back burner.

Because they are investigating the matter, there are many things the couple has to deal with, such as the return of Toby's ashes two weeks ago.

"It's just not the time yet," she said. "Each day we commit to doing something for Toby. We're going to start planning it eventually."

Union Park Animal Hospital said they had no further comment.