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## Todd Belcher—A Penchant for Pet Portraits

Companionship, comfort, unconditional love and good times—pets can contribute to quality of life in any number of ways.

Local artist Todd Belcher enjoys the sense of fun that the family dogs bring to his regular routine. "Their enthusiasm is contagious; they get so excited about new places and things, even something like just seeing a squirrel. We go out for an hour or more every day, and they get their exercise and so do I." Many pet owners would agree when he says, "They are truly members of the family, and my wife Stephanie and I are as devoted to them as they are to us."

In Todd's case, the mutual bond led to a new artistic dimension when he painted a portrait of the couple's dog, Jimmy, a few years ago. "When I did the eyes and it captured the way he looked, I discovered that this was something I really loved," he said. With that portrait, Todd found a natural and satisfying expression of his empathy for animals and his artistic talent.

The next portrait, which attracted the attention of fellow pet lovers, was the logo for the Jimmydog Design Group founded by Stephanie in 2002. The couple wanted to give the company, special-



izing in graphic design and custom portraits, a name that would reflect creativity and their feeling for animals. Jimmy, who had been abandoned as a puppy, died in 2003 at the age of 12, but the Belchers now have two more rescue dogs, Freddie and Joey.

At that time Todd already had an established reputation for his original artworks, portraits of people and professional illustrations, and he has now earned widespread recognition for his pet portraits, many of them commissioned as gifts, that he paints in acrylics or as black and white drawings. He has done portraits of dogs, cats, even a horse, for clients all over the country.

Todd, who works from photographs, explained that he zeros in first on the eyes and goes from there to other individual characteristics. "The most important thing is the eyes, but if you capture the details—the way the mouth opens, the tilt of the head, the way the fur lies—the way it all looks comes together to convey the personality of the subject." He said that he also tries to paint in a lively manner with some movement so that the result is not a lifeless, static representation.

A pet portrait is a special gift. One of Todd's most complicated was commissioned by Dana Fowler of Moore, S.C.,



and her three sisters who wanted a painting of seven dogs, six of them related, that had been important over the years to their mother, Glenda Jones of Hickory. "Todd captured the essence of each dog, and when Mom saw the picture, she was so touched. She has so many wonderful memories of each dog and now she can enjoy that legacy every day," Dana said. "One of my sisters thought it might be too painful for her, but it helps her to remember them and keeps them alive for her."

A pet portrait, Dana pointed out, is a unique present that no one expects or anticipates. "It is such a thoughtful gift because it shows you care about the person receiving it. You are not just getting a shirt or sweater so you can cross the name off your Christmas list."

Todd grew up in Dallas, N.C., and received his B.S. and M.A. in art education from Appalachian State University. He taught art in public schools, community colleges and universities before becoming a fulltime artist in 2003. The pet portraits are as meaningful to Todd as they are to the recipients. "It makes me happy to do these portraits because I know I am creating something that people will really enjoy. I try to make every one special, and since this is what I do I appreciate feedback."


Todd's pet portraits have been featured in magazines such as Modern Dog, Just for Pets, Australia's Urban Animal and, in June, Winston-Salem Monthly. His painting of the North Carolina State dog, "Plott Hound at Pilot Mountain," is featured in the October issue of Our State. From teaching art to making pet portraits available to animals-lovers, Todd is a great example of "From Passion to Profit."

For more information, Todd can be contacted at 336-201-7475. Visit [www.jimmydog.com](http://www.jimmydog.com).

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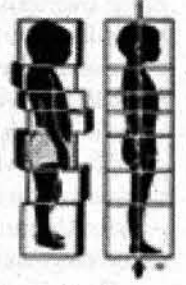
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