

# Leaving town? Get a house-sitter

By MAGGIE HANNAH  
Herald Special

While many people have winter vacations to fun in the sun or skiing holidays, others say they can't leave their pets without care or are afraid some disaster will befall their home during the cold weather.

A Ballinafad area housewife would like to change all that by providing a house-sitting service for would-be vacationers.

Jeanine Burns of 5 Sideroad would like to set up a business of looking after pets, plants, lawns and gardens, stocking essentials in the fridge for the travellers' return and any other similar task a vacationer might like to have done for him.

Six years of living in the country has made Mrs. Burns aware of how much neighbours rely on each other, but it also makes her realize how reluctant you are to ask too much of your friends.

"When we go away the pets next door look after the cat," she said, "but I hate to ask them to change the litter. When people are doing things for you as a favor ask the least possible of them because you don't want to impose any more than you can help."

### HIRE SOMEONE

"If they hire someone they are paying to have their job done, then you don't mind asking for what you want."

Mrs. Burns spent 12 years as a bilingual secretary in Toronto before leaving to become a housewife and mother. Now that her children are almost school age, she finds she has time she wants to fill with something that will restore a bit of her independence and not totally disrupt family life.

Mrs. Burns says her husband Larry, a Toronto dentist, is used to her ideas and supports them as something she wants to do which keeps her happy.

She has tried her hand at art and ceramics, has numerous house plants, loves to garden, does macramé, does her own decorating and refinishes furniture. She also enjoys going to auctions where she buys antiques. She re-sells items she doesn't want.

### TWO CHILDREN

Couple all that with raising two children and looking after the family cottage in the summer and she appears to be a busy lady.

"I'm always busy but it's still not enough. I don't know what I want. I guess it's self-fulfillment. I miss



Ballinafad area resident Jeanine Burns has started a unique local service "house-sitting" for vacationing homeowners. Mrs. Burns will keep an eye on dwellings, look after pets, water houseplants and even prepare the home for its occupants' return.

business and I find I'm slowing down.

Since Mrs. Burns first talked about the idea with some friends, she discovered a Toronto woman is operating such a service in the city and has been interviewed on television about her business.

Mrs. Burns says she was worried about two things and is still hesitant about how she should handle them if she gets her business set up. One is unfriendly dogs and the other is how to treat the demise of a pet or plant entrusted to her.

### UNFRIENDLY DOGS

"If a dog seemed unfriendly I guess I'd just have to refuse," she says. "I'm not going to take my life in my hands. You can't leave a small dog cooped up. They have to be taken out for exercise and I'd be prepared to take dogs for a walk. But I'm not going to be

putted all over the street.

She says she isn't fussy about reptiles but she understands they only get fed "once a month or something like that" so she could probably manage it.

Talking to her insurance agent about what liability she would face in case a pet died, she feels she could ask customers to sign a release. If she got that technical her service would lose the neighborhood approach she fears.

### In the summer she would be

prepared to pack up vegetables and put them in the customer's refrigerator. In winter, if a storm came up and the customer had supplied the snow or someone to call, she would arrange to have the driveway cleared on the day they arrive home.

There are all sorts of little extras that might be included at the whim of the customer. For someone with Mrs. Burns' executive turn of mind the possibilities appear unlimited.

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