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The Virginian-Pilot's



ANIMAL MAGNETISM

Published: April 4, 2004**Section:** GRACIOUS LIVING, page F1**Source:** MARY REID BARROW, THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

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ABOUT HALF THE new patients at Konikoff Family Dentistry in Virginia Beach did not go to the new facility because they thought the dental care would be good, though they may well have thought that, too.

No, the No. 1 reason patients came was because they were entranced by the big whimsical animal **topiaries** that line the General Booth Boulevard property. They said they loved Dr. David B. Konikoff's leafy green, leaping dolphins, cranes with outspread wings, and dainty seahorses, said front desk receptionist Rebecca Karajewski. "Probably five out of 10 people say it's because they drove down here and saw the **topiaries**," Karajewski said. "The waterfall is a big one too." She was speaking of the large rock waterfall overseen by a super 7-foot **topiary** crane at the entrance to the office parking lot. The waterfall is just one more imaginative piece in the landscaping of what easily could have been a routine looking office building. In fact probably no other office in Hampton Roads is landscaped with such a parade of unusual **topiary** seashore animals to delight motorists as they drive by.

But the appearance of the **creatures** at Konikoff's facility was really not all that unusual, not if you look inside, too. The **topiaries** are just a fanciful extension of the office interior, decorated in a Disney theme with three-dimensional murals, aquariums and Konikoff himself in a sports shirt embroidered with Disney characters.

Although Konikoff would like to also have Disney characters marching outside along General Booth Boulevard, he said he thought the cartoon critters would not fit in well with historic Nimmo United Methodist Church across the road, said Pauline Heath, general manager of Konikoff's three offices.

"The **topiaries** are in keeping with the historical district area around Nimmo," she explained. At the same time the living sculptures are eye-catching, appealing and fun to see.

The big **topiaries** were acquired through Gail Arnold, who owns **Topiaries** Home Eclectique in Virginia Beach. Arnold also is the **topiaries'** own private gardener.

"I call myself the beautician," Arnold said.

She trims up the rapidly growing creeping fig vine about every two weeks in good weather. She puts slow-release fertilizer in among the vines once a month.

Creeping fig is unforgiving if it dries out, but Konikoff's big **topiaries** have sprinkler systems inside their bodies. The sprinklers are hooked to the office's underground sprinkler system and are on a timer set for every 20 minutes.

Creeping fig is not winter hardy here either. When the temperature went below freezing this winter, Arnold wrapped the figures with burlap, but the weather was so cold that some plants died. However, losing the creeping fig to frost or drought is not the worst thing that could happen, she added.

"What I tell people is they are purchasing the iron sculpture. I think they are a work of art."

The iron animal frames are anchored in the ground with iron stakes. They are filled with sphagnum moss, wrapped in fishing line and then planted with creeping fig.

Arnold plans to experiment this year and replace some of the creeping fig that died over the winter with other plants such as hens and chicks and sedum. "The plants can be replaced at any time to get the **topiaries** to last for years," she said.

Konikoff knows nothing of caring for **topiaries**. He is not a gardener.

Animal **topiaries** came to his mind because they are part of the landscaping at Disney World.

"I love going to Disney World," he said, "and I love the **topiaries** there."

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Description of illustration(s):

Color photos

BILL TIERNAN/THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

A **topiary** dolphins tail, above, leaps off the landscape surrounding the dental office of Dr. David Konikoff on General Booth Boulevard in Virginia Beach. **Topiaries** around the building include dolphins, right; cranes, below, and sea horses.

Graphic

HOW TO CARE FOR TOPIARIES

Although the **topiaries** at Konikoff' Family Denistry are creeping fig, beginner **topiary** owners might find it easier to care for an ivy **topiary**, which is hardy and more forgiving of watering and

temperature. Also available are herbal **topiaries**. You can generally find a variety of **topiaries** at nurseries , garden centers and shops such as **Topiaries** Home Eclectique in Virginia Beach. The following care tips come from Stauffers of Kissel Hill in Pennsylvania

CARING FOR IVY:

Water: Let soil dry slightly between waterings. Ivies do not like to be in standing water for a prolonged length of time. Over-watering is the most common mistake.

Light and temperature: Ivy **topiaries** can be kept in both bright light or shady locations, but, best if kept in direct sunlight. One to 3 hours of sun is best for variegated ivies. They do well in a wide range of temperatures. Ivy **topiaries** still can be harmed by cold if the roots freeze, which is more apt to happen if the ivy isn't in the ground, but it all depends on how thick the **topiary** or pot is and where it is located. In freezing weather you can put it indoors, into a garage or in a protected spot with mulch. Also watch for spider mites with ivy if you keep your **topiary** inside.

Fertilizer: Apply a liquid general houseplant fertilizer at half rate every other watering when temperatures are above 50 degrees F. Use 30-10-10 on green ivies. Use 15-30-15 on variegated ivy.

HERBAL: (ROSEMARY, SILVER THYME, ETC.)

Water: Let soil dry slightly between thorough waterings. Herbal **topiaries** also do not like to be in standing water or dry soil for a prolonged length of time.

Light and temperature: Herbal **topiaries** can accept a wide range of temperatures, but generally thrive best between 65 and 80 degrees F. They will thrive best in direct sunlight with 3 to 4 hours sun.

Fertilizer: Apply a liquid general houseplant fertilizer 30-10-10 at half rate every other watering during fall, winter and spring. In summer use full rate with every other watering.

Extra care for all topiaries: Keep your **topiary** in shape by winding growth around the **topiary** form and pulling out dry leaves. Prune out the appropriate area on your **topiary** to keep its unique shape. Pinch long shoots to keep your plant full and compact.

Photo

bill tiernan / The Virginian-Pilot

Inside Dr. David B. Konikoff's office, the whimsical decor includes aquarium room dividers.

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