



ROYALTY DESCENDS ON MALL

DUCHESS OF YORK SARAH FERGUSON DRAWS A CROWD AT TOUR STOP IN JACKSON

Thursday, August 8, 2002

Karalee Miller, Beacon Journal staff writer



Sarah Ferguson, Duchess of York and spokeswoman for a chain of malls, greets fans at Westfield Shoppingtown Belden Village.

JACKSON TWP.: Where there's royalty, there's curiosity. Both filled the Westfield Shoppingtown Belden Village on Wednesday.

Nearly 3,000 onlookers flocked to the former Belden Village Mall to catch a glimpse of **Sarah Ferguson**, the Duchess of York. The royal visit to the Canton area was part of a whirlwind tour across the state to generate buzz for Westfield Shoppingtown, a chain of malls.

"This is more exciting than the president," said Barbie Bomer, 25, of Akron, who met former President George Bush three years ago.

Ferguson is official spokeswoman for the 61 malls owned by an Australian real estate company. Ohio is home to six of the malls, including the former Southpark Mall in Strongsville, where **Ferguson** began her visits Wednesday.

Arriving by helicopter from a Westfield Shoppingtown in Toledo a little after 3 p.m., **Ferguson** was chauffeured to the mall's north entrance. She was greeted with shouts and applause.

Dressed in a knee-length black suit, **Ferguson** shook the hands of several well-wishers, signed autographs and posed for pictures.

Upon spotting 5-year-old Jenna Piersol of Green, who came decked out in her own little pink crown, **Ferguson** leaned over and apologized.

"I'm sorry. I didn't bring my crown or my wand today," she told the wide-eyed girl.

Jenna's mother, Vicki Piersol, 44, said she had to talk her daughter out of wearing complete royal garb.

"She wanted to come in full dress," she said. "She's been expecting Cinderella."

Once inside, **Ferguson** was escorted to the center of the mall where she addressed the crowd, thanking them for coming out for the afternoon.

"I wanted to say that I have never seen so many people for a very long time -- probably since 1986," she said.

Ferguson spoke on everything from the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 to the upcoming Westfield Works Wonders, a nationwide, after-hours shopping event scheduled for Nov. 10. Every year, it benefits more than 2,400 nonprofit organizations across the country. Since it began in 1998, the event has raised more than \$5.5 million.

Ferguson said she had no reservations about signing on with Westfield after learning about the company's work ethic and community service efforts.

"I'm one of those people who goes where my heart goes," she said.

Ferguson said the warmth and kindness she has received from Americans has helped her deal with her feelings of low self-confidence and self-worth.

"(Americans) said, 'It's OK, Fergie. We embrace you as you are.' . . . My children have their mother back because of you."

For Jennifer Grieves, 31, of Kent, embracing **Ferguson** was easy.

"She's so down to earth," she said. "She just fits right into American culture."

Ferguson didn't come empty-handed. She arrived holding her doll, "Little Red," which she gave to 5-year-old Carrie Miller of Canton. The gift brought tears to the little girl's stepmother, Lona Miller.

"You're going to be the talk of the town, Carrie," Miller said to the girl.

Ironically, **Ferguson** said she doesn't enjoy shopping.

"I hate shopping, but my children love it," she said. "I think I would love it if I had the time."

Ferguson later signed personalized autographs for several people lucky enough to be admitted into a VIP section of the mall.

"I admire her guts. She's gutsy," said Mary Feliciano, 48, of Louisville, one of the mall's 10 contest winners who got to meet **Ferguson** one-on-one. "She controls her own life and she doesn't let a man dominate her."



Fergie the famous: Above, Duchess of York **Sarah Ferguson** talks with a young girl at Westfield Shoppingtown Belden Village in Jackson Township. At right, **Ferguson** waves to fans as she is being escorted at the mall. **Ferguson** is the spokeswoman for the Australian chain of malls.



PHOTO: 3 photos by KEN LOVE / Akron Beacon Journal



Stark residents rub elbows with Duchess of York

Thursday, August 8, 2002

By CHARITA M. GOSHAY Repository staff writer

JACKSON TWP. -- It was a welcome fit for a queen.

More than 1,000 people descended on Westfield Shoppingtown Belden Village on Wednesday to get a glimpse of Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York.

With a smile as bright as her red hair, Ferguson did not disappoint the crowd that had come to see a real, live royal.

It was a snapshot of America: People of all ages, some dressed to the nines, while others were in typical Midwestern summer fare: T-shirts, baseball caps and sneakers.

Ferguson, who arrived by helicopter, was greeted at the door by a phalanx of flashing cameras, four U.S. Marines, a trumpeter in white tie and tails, and two small children who presented her with flowers.

As her bodyguards parted the sea of onlookers, the line stretched from the front doors to the center of the mall.

"I think it's really cool," said Katie McArthur, 13, who received an autograph from the duchess.

Fred Richter of Massillon and his grandson, Martin J. Seifert, 14, came out of curiosity.

"I think she's just the type of person that likes Americans," Richter said. "I think she enjoys being here. She represents her country well."

Ferguson, spokeswoman for the Australia-based retailer, was in town to introduce Westfield Works Wonders, a program created by Westfield Shoppingtown to assist local charities.

The event also included a luncheon for representatives of more than 150 local charities.

Christen Ellis and Tina Paek, both of Akron, came to the mall to shop, and didn't know Ferguson was going to be there. But "we saw the sign in front of the mall, so we decided to stay," they said. "We thought it would be neat to say we saw royalty," Paek added.



Repository / Scott Heckel

SIGN HERE. Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York, stops to sign an autograph for a young fan at Westfield Shoppingtown Belden Village on Wednesday.

Ferguson was married to Prince Andrew, the second son of Queen Elizabeth II, from 1986 until the couple divorced in 1996. They have two daughters, Beatrice, 14, and Eugenie, 12.

Chriss Mockridge of Canton, a native of England who has lived in the United States for four years, said Wednesday's visit was the second time she saw Ferguson. Mockridge went to London on Ferguson's wedding day, and saw Ferguson and Prince Andrew ride by in a carriage. On Wednesday, Mockridge, who is Christian education director at Zion United Church of Christ in North Canton, got even closer to the duchess. Ferguson autographed a British newspaper Mockridge had brought along about the duchess. Ferguson scrawled "Sarah!" — with a flourish and an exclamation point in black felt-tipped pen, beneath a photo in the newspaper of herself and her two daughters.

Rachel Wade, 5 1/2, of North Canton did more than just see the duchess. "She shook Rachel's hand," Amy Wade, Rachel's mother, said excitedly. A wide-eyed Rachel smiled a gap-toothed grin and nodded.

George Kammer of Jackson Township said he arrived at the mall at 3:15 p.m. "because I figured she'd be late. I've heard so much about her, so I wanted to see her in person.

"This is the first I've seen any royalty from Britain. She looks very good, seems very charming," he said, then added, "She's lost a lot of weight."

Ferguson was impressed by the turnout.

"I have never seen so many people for a very long time," Ferguson said to laughter. "Probably not since 1986."

Poking fun at herself, Ferguson added, "I used to get out of cars, and would be glad to see so many people. There was no one when I started making a fool of myself. You might have read about it."

Ferguson's fun-loving antics as a royal irritated Buckingham Palace insiders, and eventually became cannon fodder for the British tabloids.

"The reason why I love America is, eight years ago, I had no self-confidence, no self-worth," Ferguson told the crowd. "I thought I had ruined my life forever. The American people said 'Fergie, it's OK.' My children have their mother back, thanks to you.

"I'm glad to see so many people. It's music to my heart. Thank you."

Ferguson said she agreed to promote Westfield Works Wonders because of its diversity.

The Westfield centers will conduct a nationwide, after-hours shopping event from 6 to 9 p.m. Nov. 10. Local charities may sell admission tickets for \$5, and keep 100 percent of the proceeds.

Lake Cable residents and fellow Britons Don and Pat Bower said they came to see Ferguson, "to get a touch of England."

"She loves Americans," Pat Bower said. "She's so happy with her ex-husband now. She's never been happier."

Ferguson also took the opportunity to plug one of her own foundations, Chances for Children, whose offices in the World Trade Center were destroyed in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Ferguson said she was about 30 minutes away from the offices when the attack occurred.

Ferguson still lives in Great Britain, but works mostly in the United States, where she is a commercial spokeswoman for several companies.

Ironically, Ferguson said she hates shopping, but that her daughters love it.

“I think I would like it if I had more time,” she said.

Asked why Americans seem to like to her, Ferguson’s eyes widened. She shrugged.

“I suppose it’s because I am who I am,” she said.

Ferguson said the American media has been more forgiving of her foibles than their British counterparts.

“I think the American press has given me a fair crack at the whip,” she said.

Ferguson didn’t avoid questions about the upcoming fifth anniversary of the death of Princess Diana.

“I miss her more than ever,” she said. “She was my best friend since I was 14. She was my sister.”

Before leaving, Ferguson met with local officials, mall employees, and meet-and-greet contest winners at a private reception.

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Repository copy editor Karen Sidaway contributed to this report.

Photos by Scott Heckel / Repository



GARDEN ART

Sculptures add polish to landscape. **E1**

A GYMNASTIC CHAMP

Defeat last month motivates Tasha Schwikert. **D1**

DEVIL RAYS **2**

INDIANS **6**



THE PLAIN DEALER

METROPOLITAN
35¢

THURSDAY, AUGUST 8, 2002

LK GA LN SP ME LG ☆☆☆☆☆

Free Gruttadauria, victims urge
Mr. Coffee founder expresses ‘genuine sadness’ toward broker

JOHN CANIGLIA
Plain Dealer Reporter

Frank Gruttadauria wants to get out of jail, and he is getting help from the most unlikely of sources: the biggest victims of his investment scam.

Four families who say the former Gates Mills broker fleeced tens of millions of dollars from them wrote

CLIENT OUTRAGED: George Forbes says broker's ex-employer made attacks against him. **B1**

letters asking a judge to release Gruttadauria from the Lake County Jail until his criminal case ends.

Gruttadauria's lawyers filed the letters in federal court yesterday in an appeal of U.S. Magistrate Judge

William Baughman's order to keep Gruttadauria in jail. Baughman said in February that Gruttadauria was a risk to run.

In the letters, the attorneys for Andrew Rayburn, Dominic Visconsi, Carl Fazio and Samuel Glazer said that Gruttadauria has been very helpful in their civil cases against the brokerage firms and that they would not mind if he were let out of jail.

“For a period of months, I was very angry at Frank,” wrote Glazer, co-founder of Mr. Coffee. “However, with the passage of time, my anger has shifted to the arrogant and greedy companies that Frank worked for, and I have a feeling of genuine sadness toward Frank. . . . In my personal opinion, Frank Gruttadauria is not a flight risk, and I would certainly support his being re-

leased from jail under appropriate circumstances.”

Rayburn's attorney, Philip Kushner, said his client wouldn't object to Gruttadauria's release to home detention. He “has cooperated with us and provided information concerning his theft and mismanagement of Mr. Rayburn's accounts,” Kushner wrote.

SEE BROKER | **A14**



Gruttadauria

ROYAL RETAILING



DALE OMORI | THE PLAIN DEALER

About 300 people gathered yesterday to see Sarah Ferguson, Duchess of York, at SouthPark Center, which has been renamed Westfield Shoppingtown Southpark. Ferguson stopped over in Strongsville as part of a day of flying to several Ohio malls that were recently bought by the Australian Westfield firm. She said she was working for Westfield because she likes the company's charity program. Story, **B1**

New tactic pushed in war on drugs
Initiative wants Ohio voters to authorize treatment instead of jail

SANDY THEIS
Plain Dealer Bureau Chief

COLUMBUS — After mastering Wall Street, financier George Soros decided to invest in people.

He fortified free expression in Hungary by sending copy machines to dissidents whose copiers had been placed under lock and key.

During the Russian economic collapse, he sent cash to scientists

with the hope of averting a brain drain.

But the fall of the Berlin Wall turned his sights to America, where he became troubled by the war on drugs: Kids urged to turn in their parents. The erosion of hard-won protections against unlawful search and seizure. And political leaders, fearing the label “soft on crime,” refusing to critically analyze whether this war could be won.

Soros eventually concluded that more treatment — and less jail time — was needed to reduce addictions and restore liberties.

The New York billionaire is among a trio of wealthy businessmen — along with Cleveland's Peter Lewis — helping to bankroll a state-by-state effort to reform drug laws.

They've succeeded in 12 of their 13 efforts, and Ohio is their latest tar-

get. Known as the Ohio Campaign for New Drug Policies, the group yesterday submitted petitions to place a proposal on the Nov. 5 ballot that would amend the Ohio Constitution and require the state to offer treatment instead of incarceration for nonviolent first- and second-time offenders who possess anything from marijuana to heroin.

SEE VOTE | **A12**

RTA hands
\$49,000
shoe bill
to union

Audit cites questionable purchases by workers

RICH EXNER
Plain Dealer Reporter

One pair of feet. Six pairs of shoes. Five different sizes.

All bought on the same day by the same employee through RTA's uniform-reimbursement program.

The shoes were among 12 pairs the RTA worker bought within a two-month period. The \$671 purchase was among hundreds of “questionable and inappropriate” shoe purchases made by RTA employees totaling \$49,295 over four years, according to an internal audit released this week.

The shoes were bought by RTA bus and train operators, booth attendants and supervisors. Apparently, some of them were purchased for other people.

The biggest purchase was for \$1,061 for 10 pairs, many in different sizes, bought by one employee over the four years. Another employee spent \$880 in two months on nine pairs of shoes. Those shoes ranged in size from 7½ to 12.

Now RTA wants its money back.

Joe Calabrese, general manager of the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority, sent a letter to the union Friday, demanding repayment. The union runs the shoe and uniform program. The audit found RTA “may have grounds for recovery.”

Calabrese's letter said legal action could follow if a payment arrangement is not made. But Gary Johnson, spokesman for Local 268 Amalgamated Transit Union, said the union had no immediate plans to pay.

SEE SHOES | **A7**

Inquiry targets
turnpike aide's
travel expenses

TED WENDLING
Plain Dealer Bureau

COLUMBUS — At least 155 times during the last four years, longtime Ohio Turnpike Commission lobbyist Patrick J. Patton left his Rocky River home, jumped into his Turnpike-owned 2000

Buick LeSabre, charged about \$20 in gas to his Turnpike credit card and headed for Columbus.

But records show that Patton wasn't driving to the state capital to work for the Turnpike Commission, even though the commission was paying him.

His destination was the Ohio Police and Fire Pension Fund Board, where he serves as an unpaid trustee. And it was the Columbus-based pension fund that reimbursed Patton \$8,740 in mileage for those trips made in the commission's LeSabre, according to a state inspector general's report issued Tuesday.

Double-dipping? Not according to Patton and his former boss, Turnpike Executive Director Gino Zomparelli.

“We have to make sure the road is policed,” Zomparelli told investigators during a sworn interview on June 26.

SEE PATTON | **A10**

The wizard of whistling is dead

Ron McCroby delighted Johnny Carson, performed with jazz, symphonic groups

ALANA BARANICK
Plain Dealer Reporter

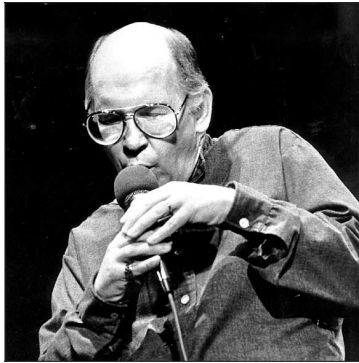
AURORA — Ron McCroby puckered up and blew his way to fame as the “World's Greatest Whistler” on “The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson,” at the Monterey Jazz Festival, with jazz groups and symphony orchestras, on recordings and concert stages at home and abroad.

“That's the most fascinating thing I've ever heard,” Carson said after McCroby's initial performance on his show, according to the Smithsonian magazine. “He could hold his own with any jazz instrumentalist in the country.”

The former Little Tykes advertising director was not as visible in his voice-over roles as a whistling penguin on the Scooby Doo cartoon series, as Winnie-the-Pooh for Disney PlayStation ads or as Tenderheart Bear on American Greetings Care Bear commercials.

McCroby, 68, died Monday at his home in Aurora.

The former Chagrin Falls resident moved to Aurora two weeks ago, around the time that he became ill and was tested for cancer. The results of those tests and the cause of death have not been determined. McCroby's wife of 48 years, Barbara Jo, believes he died of a heart attack.



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ron McCroby, performing in 1993. He died at age 68.

Ronald A. McCroby's first public appearance as a whistler was at a high school football game in his native Morgantown, W.Va., when he filled in for an ailing piccolo player.

SEE MCCROBY | **A15**

INSIDE

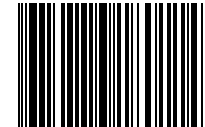
Explosions hit Colombia

Huge explosions rock Colombia's capital and the area around Parliament as hard-line Alvaro Uribe is sworn in as president. Police say at least 14 people were killed. **A2**

Easy way to lose weight

Scientists have isolated a hormone that makes us feel full when we eat. **A10**

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|------------------|------------|-------------------|-----------|
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WEATHER

Sunny and very nice. Clear and cool tonight. High 74, low 56. Map, **B10**.

PEDALING FOR RELIEF

Cyclists pedaling across the country to raise awareness for foreign relief aid, stop in Cleveland. **B2**

THE PLAIN DEALER

FIRE DAMAGES FLATS BUSINESS



JOSHUA GUNTER | THE PLAIN DEALER

A firefighter peers from the smouldering Morgan Uniform and Linen building in Cleveland yesterday as a colleague's hose blasts out of the next window. The fire erupted shortly before 10 a.m. and burned through the one-story brick storage building on Carter Road in the Flats. One employee was treated at MetroHealth Medical Center for minor upper-body burns. The fire started when a worker accidentally dropped a gasoline container on an electric work lamp, fire officials said. Damages were estimated at \$500,000. An adjacent building was damaged by smoke, firefighters said.

No money left to pay lawyers

Juvenile Court copes with budget cuts

ANDREA SIMAKIS
Plain Dealer Reporter

Cuyahoga County Juvenile Court has run out of money to pay the attorneys who work in its halls, including those who represent abused and neglected children.

The last checks for court-appointed lawyers were written July 1. They have collected no fees since and are threatening to accept no more new cases.

For now, the cash-strapped county commissioners aren't willing to give the court an emergency infusion of money to plug the hole.

Commissioners, facing a fiscal crisis and trying to stave off a deficit, slashed the juvenile-court budget as part of across-the-board cuts to all county agencies at the beginning of the year.

County Administrator Dave Reines said the court's lawyer fees "are not exorbitant by any stretch of the imagination."

But, he added, "We're not in the position to provide additional funds."

The court for now has to dig deep into its pockets to compensate more than 230 lawyers who defend kids charged with crimes ranging from shoplifting to murder but can't afford to hire an attorney.

SEE BUDGET | B10

"My kids are in New York spending the money I am earning. I go shopping just like anyone else."

Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York



DALE OMORI | THE PLAIN DEALER

Some mall visitors, like this one, were willing to go to great lengths for a photo of Sarah Ferguson, Duchess of York, during yesterday's stop at Westfield Shoppingtown Southpark.

Mall reopening was a royal affair

V. DAVID SARTIN
Plain Dealer Reporter

STRONGSVILLE — About 300 people got a glimpse of British royalty yesterday. Thirty others stood next to her for a few seconds for a photograph.

Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York, and former wife of Andrew, Duke of York, was at the old South-

Park Center, on Ohio 82, at what the new mall owners called a grand opening.

Amid shouts of "I love you, Fergie," the trip was an attention-getter. She drew attention to several sponsors and her child advocacy charities.

Southpark and other Ohio malls got a chance to tout a new name.

Bought earlier this year by an Aus-

tralia-based firm, the mall has been renamed Westfield Shoppingtown Southpark. Later, she went to renamed Westfield Shoppingtown malls in Toledo and Canton. Her helicopter did not stop at Great Northern in North Olmsted and Midway in Elyria, but mayors from both those towns greeted Ferguson yesterday in Strongsville.

SEE FERGUSON | B10

Forbes says firm 'attacked' his name

NAACP chief had quietly tried to settle case with Gruttadauria's ex-firm

JOHN CANIGLIA
Plain Dealer Reporter

George Forbes' hushed attempts to settle with one of Frank Gruttadauria's former brokerage firms ended yesterday when Forbes publicly lashed out at what he called the company's smear campaign.

Forbes, the president of the Cleveland NAACP, claims SG Cowen attacked him personally in an arbitration case over his wife's trust, which was handled by Gruttadauria. Forbes wants federal arbitrators in Cleveland to punish the company.

"Incredibly, SG Cowen . . . engages in the lowest form of 'attacking the victim,' reminiscent of the way defense counsel used to attack rape victims in criminal cases," wrote Forbes' lawyer, Robert Duvin.

The lawyer's claims are in response to statements filed last month by Cowen in which the company implied, according to Duvin, that Forbes was a participant in Gruttadauria's scam. The firm wants the case dismissed, claiming that Forbes knew about the risk and should have controlled his losses.

"Indeed, for every scheme by a dishonest broker, there are invariably some winners alongside the losers," Cowen's attorneys wrote.

SEE FORBES | B5

Patrol takes hospitalized ex-policeman into custody

Hospital says state delayed arrest to avoid paying bills

MICHAEL SANGIACOMO AND REGINA MCENERY

Plain Dealer Reporters

The State Highway Patrol last night arrested a former Columbus police officer in a fatal shooting, but not before the Cuyahoga County hospital that has been treating him raised a stink.

MetroHealth Medical Center officials accused the state and Franklin County police of attempting to delay Hermando "Cliff" Harton Jr.'s arrest until after the hospital discharged him to avoid paying the suspect's medical bills.

It's still not clear, however, who is responsible for Harton's medical bills — Franklin County, the state or Harton. Staff Lt. John Born of the Highway Patrol said Harton is now in their custody, but he said that didn't mean the state assumes responsibility for Harton's treatment.

Highway Patrol officers have been guarding Harton since he was flown to MetroHealth's trauma center last Friday with gunshot wounds to his back and arm.

SEE BILLS | B5

County to speed up response to crises

HARLAN SPECTOR
Plain Dealer Reporter

Cuyahoga County is revamping its crisis response system for adults who may be living in dangerous conditions, after three well-publicized cases this year involving older women who had no utilities.

Most recently, a mentally impaired East Side woman went 15 days without running water even though she had an active case with the county adult-welfare agency. The incident pointed up a failure of the agency to respond promptly to a

call from a concerned woman about the water shut-off.

In that and one other case, county authorities obtained court orders to remove elderly women from their homes only after The Plain Dealer made inquiries.

The county Department of Senior and Adult Services has changed procedures and devoted a response team to critical cases. The agency now requires its social workers to attempt face-to-face contact within three hours of receiving an emergency call.

SEE RESPONSE | B5

INSIDE

No dodging

Supporters of a state initiative to require treatment instead of jail time for some drug offenders call on political leaders to voice their support, or else. **B2**

Fans show passion

Adults who have a close personal connection to gymnastics or have a child involved develop a strong appreciation for the events. **B3**



Columnist Regina Brett is off today.

Cat lover snagged by new law

Akron woman joins suit after pet is trapped, killed same day

MARTIN STOLZ
Plain Dealer Reporter

AKRON — Mikey, a dark gray cat dappled with white, found Rachel Neuwirth five years ago in a Wadsworth barn.

After moving to Akron's Goodyear Heights neighborhood, he often showed appreciation for the good life he had with Neuwirth, 26, by dropping dead field mice at her doorstep, she said.

On July 8, though, Mikey disappeared. Neuwirth found his unfastened collar on a street near her home. Two days later, she discovered that Mikey had

been euthanized by Summit County animal-control authorities on the day he got captured under a controversial Akron law aimed at curbing free-roaming cats.

Eight Akron residents recently filed a lawsuit, asking a judge to block enforcement of the city's cat law and to declare it unconstitutional. Neuwirth joined the suit and is seeking damages for Mikey's death.

The suit lacks merit and the law will be found constitutional, said Max Rothal, Akron's law director.

The city ordinance calls for holding the cats for three days,

unless the animals are "obviously" feral or "severely" sick or injured, said Glenn James, animal-control director for Summit County, which is housing and euthanizing the animals for Akron.

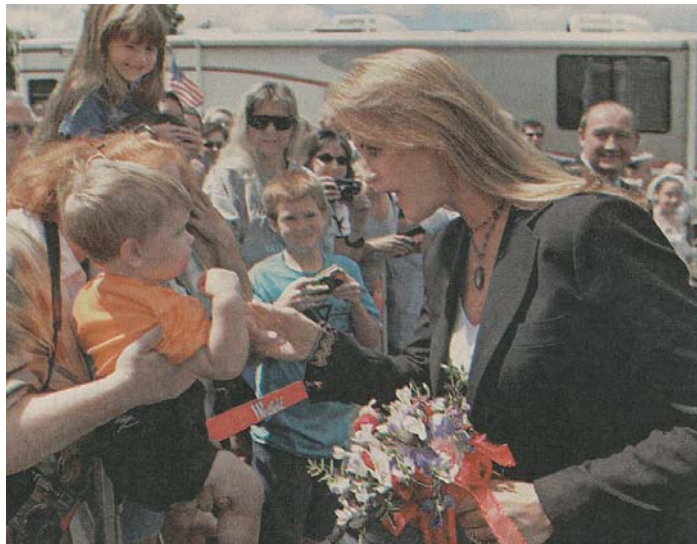
James alone determines which cats to house and which to destroy, he said. Since the law's June 25 enactment until Monday, 442 cats had been captured and 320 destroyed.

Mikey was destroyed because of an unspecified injury, according to county records. Neuwirth said Mikey was healthy the morning he disappeared.

SEE CATS | B10



Published on August 8, 2002 Blade, The (Toledo, OH)



A ROYAL WELCOME

Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York, is greeted by Samuel Richmond and his mother, Carrie, of Perrysburg, as the former wife of Great Britain's Prince Andrew arrives for the grand opening of Westfield Shoppingtown Franklin Park. The popular duchess is a spokeswoman for the mall's new owner, Westfield America Trust of Australia, which owns 61 Shoppingtowns in the United States and scores more around the world.



NO COMMON RECEPTION GIVEN TO ROYAL VISITOR

Residents greet Duchess of York with mix of curiosity, respect

By **MARIA SPROW**
Blade Staff Writer

As her helicopter touched down, the applause erupted. And when she stepped onto the makeshift landing zone in the J.C. Penney parking lot, shouts of "We love you!" greeted her.

While she's no longer a member of the royal family, **Sarah Ferguson**, the Duchess of York and the former wife of Queen Elizabeth's son, Prince Andrew, received the royal treatment from area residents during her 90-minute visit yesterday to Westfield Shoppingtown Franklin Park in West Toledo.

"No [British] royal has ever come to Toledo. ... I thought she was a breath of fresh air for the royal family," said Sylvania resident Sandy Connors, who stood outside the mall with hundreds of others to watch the helicopter land.

"I've never done anything like this before, except I came to see Burt Reynolds once," Ms. Connors added.

The Duchess was at the mall to participate in its grand opening - open 31 years, it was bought this year by Westfield America Trust of Australia - and to promote the Westfield Works Wonders charity event, scheduled from 6 to 9 p.m. Nov. 10 at the mall.

Laurie Kwiatkowski of Toledo stood outside a mall entrance with her three children - Erica, 13; Jodie, 10; and Staci, 4 - waiting for the duchess to walk by "just because of her popularity," Ms. Kwiatkowski said. While she said doesn't exactly keep tabs on the royal family, it still intrigues her enough that she made the trip to the mall.

"It's interesting just because it's different - it's different than the way we live," she said, adding that her previous impressions of Ms. Ferguson have been positive. "She's a people person. I think she's pretty, and I've always admired her for that."

Ms. Kwiatkowski's moment in time was delayed for about 15 minutes. After leaving the helicopter, the duchess, dressed in black from her stiletto heels to her sport jacket, boarded a motor home to grab a bite to eat and freshen up a bit.

When she emerged, young ballet dancers from the Toledo Ballet School greeted Ms. Ferguson with a bouquet and gifts for her two children, Princesses Beatrice and Eugenie.

In turn, Ms. Ferguson exchanged greetings with some of the people, including children, who had come to see her. She also signed autographs when asked.

"Normally when you meet famous people like her, they have their nose up in the air. But she was very cordial, very nice," said Diana Tumey of Toledo who got a duchess autograph. "I said, 'Could I have an autograph?' And she said, 'Oh, certainly.' She was a really nice person."

Members of the Toledo chapter of the Daughters of the British Empire also waited among the crowd, eager to see a member of their native country's royal family.

"It was absolutely wonderful. It was one Brit with another Brit," said the group's secretary, Carolyn Rose Johns, 49, of Temperance.

"We had little ladies who have been in this group for over 50 years. They are in their 80s and 90s now, and it was the highlight for them to think that they'd actually see her. It was just overwhelming for them," said Ms. Johns, who moved to America in 1974.

Once inside, the duchess addressed an estimated 3,200 people, urging them to attend the charity event. Local charities will have the opportunity to raise money by selling \$5 tickets.

Organizers promised live music, celebrity appearances, and complimentary refreshments for the event, but Westfield Marketing Director John Simoneau said what will happen and who will come has not been confirmed.

Westfield Works Wonders is a nationwide program that has raised \$5.5 million for charities, Mr. Simoneau said. Over 30 organizations signed up to participate in the event.

Ms. Ferguson said Westfield's commitment to community outreach was the reason she became the firm's spokeswoman.

"Everything I do, I do it with my heart, because if I don't do it with my heart, it is a lie."

She said she appreciated the way she was treated in Toledo. "This reminds me of when I first joined the royal family. It's a very nice feeling. It's lovely."

She also spoke of her marital problems - which ended in divorce - that made headlines in newspapers everywhere.

A Weight Watchers spokeswoman and much slimmer, Ms. Ferguson's weight was criticized when it grew to 220 pounds at one point. The duchess said while she did not always feel accepted in England, "the American people said, 'Oh, don't worry Fergie, we'll take you as you are.' And I am so grateful."

After her remarks, the Duchess was taken to a "VIP room," where a violin quartet played and appetizers were available for her, invited guests, and 10 people chosen in a contest to meet her.

Miriam Pecsok, 25, of Whitehouse, who attended the VIP event, said she wanted to see Ms. Ferguson because the royal family is "almost like a fairy tale. It's so far removed from us.

Mrs. Pecsok's mother, Ruth, was one of the contest's winners, but gave up her chance to meet Ms. Ferguson for her daughter.

"When they called, it was just so awesome. I begged her for it. She's always been a good mom like that," she added.