Gail and Dave Liniger’s first Arabian came to them out of a tragic experience and helped to make it into a positive turning point in their lives. In the early 1980s, Gail survived a private plane crash, a crash that sent her into a coma and partial paralysis. During her three years in and out of hospitals, a therapist suggested that she include horseback riding as therapy for her injuries. Gail and Dave bought an 11-year-old grey Arabian mare who fit the bill perfectly. She was gentle and sweet and the perfect helpmate for Gail in her riding lessons.

The qualities of the mare led Gail and Dave to serious study about the breed. A trip to the Scottsdale show and sales heightened the excitement, as it did for many Scottsdale first-timers. They bought a Barbary daughter and a *Bask daughter: the *Bask daughter, Mark IV Coronation National Champion English Pleasure, and the Barbary daughter Flame Dancer (x Autumn Flair by *Eter), who (with Gordon Patts) soon brought in English pleasure wins at Scottsdale and the Buckeye, along with Regional wins and a National Top Ten.

“For us, Flame Dancer became the model by which all other Arabian horses were judged,” Dave noted. “Through her special qualities, the underlying philosophy behind our venture was spelled out early on. We looked for disposition, correct conformation, athletic ability, and beauty, with no one of those elements being a substitute for another’’ The Linigers also found that performance classes were far more appealing and exciting than halter classes, and that finding directed their breeding program.

Dave recalls how he and Gail named their program Maroon Fire Arabians: “There’s a beautiful area near Aspen, Colorado, called Maroon Bells. I was involved with several projects there and I’ve always like the word maroon. At the same time we were looking for a color scheme we could use, so that’s where we came up with Maroon Fire Arabians.”

Soon the Linigers were buying foundation stock and breeding Arabians. Not just Arabians in general, but those that would shine as performance horses. “Obviously the die was cast when we bought Afire Bey V and Flame Dancer; both were so good at English pleasure,” Dave recounts.

“That’s the direction we went with the entire program.”

Disposition was at the top of the Linigers’ criteria for purchases of foundation stock, because Gail, with her limited mobility, loves to go in the stands with the horses and treat them to carrots. So each purchase had to pass the “Gail test.”

Next, Dave and Gail wanted beauty in the form of Arabian type, plus beauty as saddlesore horses. They reviewed more than 2,000 pedigrees and inspected about 400 Arabians across the country. From that exploration, they bought foundation mares: daughters of *Eter, *Bask, Cognac, Khemosabi, Huckleberry Bey, and GG Jabask. The mares included winners at important Class A shows, Regional shows, and several Nationals winners.

The Linigers took the advice of trainer and breeder Don DeLongpré and bought six *Eter daughters for a
Burbary/Eter cross. “It was the image of Fame Dancer that encouraged us to pursue the bloodlines of Burbary and Eter,” Dave notes.

The Linigers soon became acquainted with Arabian breeders and owners, one of them being Sheila Varian. They spent hours and days with her, taking notes, learning from her experiences. The success and quality of Sheila’s Huckleberry Bey sons and daughters was impressive to the Linigers, and they soon sent mares to Huckleberry Bey. Then one fine day Dave and Gail received a call from Tim Shea at Shea Stables in St. Clair, Michigan, with the message that Dave should look at a young stallion Sheila had sent to Tim for training. Dave and Gail’s lives took a new turn when Sheila’s Afire Bey V (Huckleberry Bey x Autumn Fire by “Bask”) trotted around the corner of the barn.

“I’d spent an hour inspecting each of the dozens and dozens of stallions we looked at — looking at legs, tail carriage, necks, all that, but within ten seconds I knew Afire Bey V was the one,” Dave remembers. “He had the charisma, the charm, the big, snorty proud look. Just an unbelievable sparkle. He moved like a great big cat. So graceful and effortless and smooth and controlled; very self-possessed. An exquisite example of what an Arabian stallion should be.” A significant show record in English pleasure added to the stallion’s appeal, and by September 1989, Afire Bey V belonged to Dave and Gail. With that acquisition, the Liniger breeding program was changed forever.

Afire Bey V brought distinction not only to the Linigers, Sheila Varian, and Tim and Marty Shea, but to the Arabian breed itself. After the 2005 U.S. Nationals, Afire Bey V was recognized, now almost an annual event, as the leading sire of both halter and performance horses for the eighth consecutive year. Has any other sire equaled or surpassed this record?

So Afire Bey V reigns as the king of Shea Stables. He’s a tourist attraction and the center of every gathering there. “People don’t come to see him so much as a prospective mate for their mares,” says Marty Shea. “Frozen and transported semen and excellent photography satisfy most people. But people want to see him as one of the great sires of the breed, just because of who he is. They want to stand in his presence.”

More than 200 people traveled to Afire Bey V’s twentieth birthday party in summer 2005. “A bright beautiful day, just perfect,” Marty remembers. “All the guests got their photos taken with Afire Bey V. What a treat!” Guests toasted Afire Bey V with champagne, and he was treated to a birthday cake topped with carrots. He lapped up all the attention — he was petted by many eager hands and kids climbed on his back — and he was a gentleman through the whole day.

Afire Bey V continues his popularity with mare owners. He has sired more than 800 foals. He excels not only in quantity, but the quality of his get is noteworthy. He is credited with 159 United States, Canadian, and Youth National winners.

Star mares for the Liniger program are Charnorrita Afire (Afire Bey V x BPA Cheers by Cognac), U.S. Top Ten English Pleasure, and HL Raisa (The Chief Justice x Im Ritaska by Tracticio). Each has two lines to “Bask.” Charnorrita Afire has produced four foals for the Linigers — one by A Temptation and three by IXL Noble Express. In 2006, Charnorrita Afire’s son Chaparral DGL was named Canadian National Champion English Pleasure Junior Horse and United States National Champion English Pleasure Futurity. HL Raisa is the dam of eight Afire Bey V foals and one by IXL Noble Express.

An understudy of Afire Bey V came onto the scene in 2001. Again, Dave and Gail spent days and days and traveled
many miles to find a new stallion for the Afire Bey V daughters. IXL Noble Express (MHR Nobility x RY Fire Ghazi by "El Ghazi") fits the bill. He carries five crosses to Witraz, the sire of "Bask, plus a line to the grande dame Suscicion, celebrated producer of National winners.

"Our current program is that of breeding IXL Noble Express to the Afire Bey V daughters," says Dave. "Afire Bey V is still breeding — and siring just as well as he always has — and we have more than 1,000 straws of frozen semen. His offspring are still the winningest out there. We look forward to the first performance horses sired by Noble Express, and we're excited about watching where he goes.

In his approach to breeding Arabian horses, Dave takes the same stance as other elements: Hit life hard. He camps, fishes, and hunts all over the world, scuba dives, and enjoys flying, and trail-riding into the wilderness. A high point of this adventuresome approach came when he and several acquaintances tried to be the first to make their way around the world in a hot air balloon. They got space suits from Russia, and took their whole entourage to Australia, believed to be the best starting point for the trip. The weather did not cooperate — no good days for lifting off, and after three months the balloon crew came home, only to learn that another adventurer had beaten them to the honor. Dave pursued race car driving, had several accidents, and gave up that thrill when his family objected to the dangers.

Right now for the Linigers, three major projects occupy their time and thoughts: developing The Sanctuary, a major invitational-only golf course in Denver, and building new homes in Denver and Scottsdale. Dave and Gail are the founders of Re-Max International, a real estate company that now has several thousand franchises worldwide with more than 100,000 sales associates. This business interest leaves few days, few hours, to spend on their Arabian horses. About four times a year, they fly into Michigan to Shea Stables to visit their herd. "We show them all the horses — 71 here now," says Marty, "then we have a picnic or lunch on the lawn. We all enjoy it."

"Some of the best moments we have come in the late afternoon watching the mares and their foals," says Dave. "They run across the pastures together through the day, and the foals get a feeling quite independent. But as dusk starts to fall, they all of a sudden get closer and closer to Mom. Watching the whole evening scene of the mares and foals getting back together and just settling in very close to each other, to me that's serenity."

"Gail and I are very happy with the Arabian breed and we intend to stay with it," Dave assures. Lucky for the rest of us.