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## Want a pond? This man knows what's koi

By Sandra J. Pennecke  
Correspondent

**S**tuart Chesson was running a successful ad agency when his stepdaughter gave him a Father's Day gift that changed his life.

"It was about 11 years ago when she gave me six koi," said Chesson, who saw his blood pressure drop and his demeanor change.

He interviewed several pond builders and found that most couldn't differentiate a koi pond from a water garden.

"I designed my own pond and put it in with the help of a landscaper," said Chesson, who now has an 8,000-gallon pond with 50 koi in his Virginia Beach backyard. His koi, a Japanese variety of carp that resemble goldfish, range from 3 to 50 years old.

"The ad agency was a rewarding and gratifying career, but there was a lot of stress," Chesson said. "I could walk into my back-

yard and escape. It's like walking into another time zone."

Chesson's wife, Carolyn, now runs The Chesson Agency he started in 1994.

An avid aquarist and tropical fish hobbyist since he was a child, Chesson, 55, has raised fish from all over the world. He started Koizilla Monster Ponds, named for his love of science fiction films like "Godzilla" and "King Kong," four years ago in his home and recently opened a three-acre location in the former Signature Garden Center on Centerville Turnpike, just north of the Intra-coastal Waterway bridge.

A member of the Mid-Atlantic Koi Club and Koi Health Advisory Council, Chesson earned his certification from the University of Georgia's College of Veterinary Medicine Koi Health Management Course. He has a 20-foot microbiology mobile lab and is qualified to diagnose and treat the fish.

At Koizilla, customers can visualize koi ponds, water gardens

and water features for their own property, buy koi (\$200 to \$500) and goldfish (\$25 to \$50), plants, bonsais, koi food and more. Chesson also offers pond service and maintenance.

"For people who want one but don't know how to take care of them, I will," he said.

"I sell quality of life and a lifestyle," said Chesson, noting he plans future seminars for fellow koi keepers and goldfish lovers.

Tony and Renee Kantirakis called on Chesson's expertise to engineer a koi pond in the backyard of their Woodbridge Pointe home last summer and nurse their sick koi back to health.

"We had koi in a pond we built ourselves without a proper filtration system, and they were becoming sick. Now we have crystal clear water compared to the green water before," said Renee Kantirakis, "I'd actually let my kids swim with the fish now."

Sandra J. Pennecke, pennecke@cox.net



### Koizilla Monster Ponds

232 Centerville  
Turnpike N.  
474-1149



Stuart Chesson is owner of Koizilla Monster Ponds at the former Signature Garden Center on Centerville Turnpike.