

vetconnection

LET THE DIALOGUE BEGIN!

Animal welfare, the veterinary community, and the Humane Society of Berks County have all been changing and evolving rapidly in recent years. A person stepping forward from just ten years ago into the present might not even recognize the state of companion animal welfare- the explosion of veterinary practices in southeastern Pennsylvania, the increased profile and relevance of animal welfare in the national discourse, and the evolution of local animal shelters into progressive animal welfare organizations.

One thing that has been a little slower to change has been the sometimes rocky relationship between shelters and veterinary practices. Or have things been as stagnant in this area as everyone seems to think? Despite the continued propagation of the claim that shelters and vets don't get along, that shelters steal clients that would have gone to local practices, that vets don't appreciate the thousands of new clients shelters send into the community each year, and that neither really understands what it's like to be in the other's shoes, I'm not so sure this is really the case any longer.

The fact is the Humane Society of Berks County has received an enormous amount of support from area practices- ranging from volunteering to provide sterilization services to providing reduced cost medical services, free post-adoption exams and treatment, direct financial support of events and programs, and adoption referrals. The Humane Society of Berks County is truly grateful for this support and knows we couldn't accomplish our mission as effectively without it.

We also know that the veterinary community does, in fact, appreciate our role as the single largest source of companion animals and new clients in Berks County and as the place that helps animals in need- animals that might just end up on a veterinarian's door step, along with unpaid medical bills, if we weren't here. We know because many, many veterinarians tell us how much they appreciate us and by the support they give us.

Last year the Humane Society of Berks County created its first long-range strategic plan. This involved identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the HSBC. Some of our board and staff felt that our relationship with area vets was and had always been a weakness. I was of the opinion that it was actually one of our greatest strengths but that it could be strengthened further. This veterinary newsletter is one step toward doing just that. We want the veterinary community to know what we're doing, what other vets are doing, and what we can offer to veterinarians and their clients. We also want to hear from veterinarians to let us know what you think about us and our programs.

SO, I'LL END AS I STARTED: LET THE DIALOGUE BEGIN!

Karel J. Minor -EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



HSBC WELCOME WAGGIN'

During the past year, the Humane Society of Berks County (HSBC) has made some incredible strides: we surpassed all previous annual adoption numbers, expanded and improved the quality of our field and rescue services, improved the safety and healthfulness of our facility for the animals, expanded our PetNet Emergency Animal Foster Care Program to help more animals and their people, were appointed to be the coordinating agency responsible for creating the first Berks County Animal Response Team, and much, much more.

However, because we have accomplished so much, so quickly, we are finding that many of our friends and supporters are not entirely aware of all the great improvements we've made recently or the wonderful plans we have for the future. This is why we have created a new program called the HSBC Welcome Waggin'. Welcome Waggin' tours are free, one hour, leave-your-checkbooks-at-home, behind the scenes tours of our Reading shelter. They offer a chance to learn about all the new things going on at the HSBC; get frequently asked questions answered; meet some of the great staff, volunteers, and board who are helping to make these wonderful changes; and learn about our plans for the future.

These tours are strictly informational. We just want to know what you think of what we're doing, see if you have any ideas on how we can do it better, or hear if you know of anyone who should be introduced to our mission. We only ask for your opinions and ideas- not your money! We really mean it: exactly one hour and leave your checkbook at home.

We have many dates and times set up for Welcome Waggin' tours in the coming months. We'd love to have you (feel free to bring a friend!) join us for one of them. If you'd like to attend a Welcome Waggin', call or email Emily Branch, HSBC Education Manager, at 610-921-2348 ext. 42, or ebranch@talon.net, for available days.

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Address correspondence to:
Kennel Kapers
Humane Society of Berks County
1801 N. 11th Street
Reading, PA 19694
610-921-2348
Fax: 610-921-5833
www.berkshumane.org

STAFF

Karel Minor, *Executive Director*
Joni LaVigna, *Chief Humane Officer*
Damon March, *Operations Director*
Diane St. Francis, *Administrative Director*
Emily Branch, *Education Manager*
Jennifer Long, *Event and Volunteer
Manager*
Jennifer McDonel, *Controller*

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VETERINARY ASSISTANT TRAINING AT RACC

By: Peggy Boettcher, CVT • Reading Area Community College
Veterinary Assistant Training • Program Coordinator/Instructor

One of the newest courses of study offered through the Continuing Education division at Reading Area Community College is Veterinary Assistant Training, now in its second year. Veterinary Assistants play an important role in all veterinary hospitals, providing needed assistance to Veterinary Technicians as well as to Veterinarians.

Nineteen students completed the course last year, and many of those students are currently employed in the veterinary field, making this a popular, as well as successful, course of study. Also, last year, one student received the Lindy Scholar Memorial Award, a newly established award to be given to the outstanding student in Veterinary Assistant Training each year.

This year, the curriculum has been revised and updated, nine hours of class instruction have been added, and twenty-five students are currently enrolled. Students are interviewed individually and must meet specific requirements to be accepted into the program. Certificates are given to those students successfully completing the program, which is taught September through April each year.

The curriculum consists of four courses, each of which has its own emphasis. Course One introduces the student to the field of veterinary medicine, concentrating on office procedures, client relations, exam room procedures, vaccination protocols, and basic anatomy and physiology. There is also instruction on animal restraint, a skill necessary for all assistants to develop.

Course Two continues the student's instruction with parasitology, general laboratory procedures, pharmacology, and radiology. Two classes are held in the college's laboratory to develop hands-on skills and familiarize the student with skills needed in a veterinary hospital setting.

Courses Three and Four round out the training with lectures on inpatient care, clinical procedures, critical care, anesthesia and surgery, and, finally, emergency medicine. All four of the courses are designed to provide the student with basic, entry-level knowledge and skills necessary for pursuing a career in a veterinary hospital as an assistant. The training is technically challenging, and the students must maintain a seventy percent average on all quizzes, projects, and homework.

In conjunction with the classroom training, the students must complete a designated number of hours in a clinical setting to receive hands-on exposure and start learning basic skills. A number of our area Veterinary Hospitals have graciously volunteered to provide the students with this part of the training, which has proven to be a positive experience for both the students and the hospitals. The program welcomes additional hospitals to participate and enjoy the benefits of having a student help as the "extra pair of hands." Those hospitals interested in being part of RACC's Veterinary Assistant Training Program may contact the Continuing Education Division of the college for more information. The Veterinary Assistant Training Program strives to provide our local veterinary community with skilled individuals to fill the needs of our area hospitals.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO GET YOUR PRACTICE MORE INVOLVED WITH THE HUMANE SOCIETY?

HERE ARE A FEW WAYS YOU CAN:

- Join the growing number of vets volunteering time to provide sterilization services.
- Refer clients for adoptions services.
- Start a Walk for the Animals Team (this year's Walk is Saturday, September 30, at Shearer's Grove)
- Provide direct financial support to the HSBC or become a special event sponsor.
- Attend a Welcome Waggin' tour at the shelter.

PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT: WILLOW CREEK ANIMAL HOSPITAL ADVANCES IN PET CARE DRIVE EXPANSION OF VETERINARY PRACTICE

By Terry Scott Reed

Reading's Willow Creek Animal Hospital is a long-established, do-it-all veterinary practice. With twelve veterinarians associated, the practice treats large and small animals, and boasts an unusual, comprehensive in-house lab that is the envy of any medical practice. When you do so much for so long, the opportunities to expand your services are few. But recently, Willow Creek has converted an underused area of their building for pet rehabilitation services.

Founding partner Dr. Lenora Sammons has had an ongoing interest in pet rehabilitation. Her associate, Dr. Erin Gordon, is the recovered victim of a serious automobile accident. As the beneficiary of rehabilitative therapy, she has had a keen interest in applying her personal experience with therapy to the benefit of animals. Dr. Gordon attended ten days of classes at the University of Tennessee Veterinary School in Knoxville. She followed that up with forty hours of observation, and also had to write up five cases, and present the write-ups for grading. Each write-up dealt with an individual animal's injury and contained a detailed treatment plan using the rehabilitation techniques she had learned. Dr. Gordon became certified in June of this year, although there is no state requirement that she do so.

Rehabilitation, sometimes called physical therapy (there's a sort of gentleman's agreement to call pet work "rehabilitation" and human work "physical therapy"), is the application of non-invasive techniques to improve limb function and relieve pain. Methods available include electrical stimulation, ultrasound, massage, and exercise. The cornerstone of rehabilitation is the underwater treadmill.

The underwater treadmill is the largest item of equipment the practice had to acquire. It consists of a large cabinet, constructed for the most part of clear panels, so the animal can be carefully observed. The animal being treated enters the open-top cabinet through a watertight door, and water is pumped in to a height appropriate for the animal's size. The buoyancy of the animal in the water reduces joint impact, and the result is an earlier return to use of the affected leg for normal land walking. The water is maintained in a reservoir when not in use, and kept at a temperature between 85-90 degrees. This helps the muscles warm as the dog works.

The treadmill has a number of variable controls, to accommodate all sizes of dogs. It can be raised to an angle to increase the workout, and its speed can be varied. A readout device atop the unit times each workout and discloses the speed (in MPH) of the treadmill.

Dr. Gordon also utilizes a large balance ball that is used to strengthen leg muscles. By placing the animal on the ball (and helping it maintain its balance) the animal is required to use its leg muscles to balance on the ball. When the therapist moves the ball just a tiny bit, the animal must react and correct its position. Dr. Gordon said that, even though this procedure looks simple and the animal appears to be somewhat static, it is hard work and excellent therapy.

Gordon said that adding rehabilitative services is a natural fit with the hospital. She said Willow Creek has always been very open to alternative medication, and looks at the animal's overall well-being. This would include nutrition, nutritional supplements, and exercise recommendations to help the pet avoid problems before they arise.

Gordon cautions that it is wise for the pet owner to seek out rehabilitation therapists that are affiliated with a veterinary practice, because the first stage of therapy is diagnosis. Gordon notes two cases that especially stand out. In the first case, a German shepherd suffering with vertigo lost its ability to walk. After working with the underwater treadmill, the dog has regained its mobility, and the owner now takes it for daily one-mile walks. In another memorable experience, Gordon told of a dachshund that underwent back surgery, and has been unable to walk, but is now able to do so on the underwater treadmill, and is headed for a recovery.

Dr. Gordon advised that, depending on the severity of the problem, about three visits a week may be needed until the pet shows progress. But she also said that in instances such as geriatric patients, one visit a week is helpful and appropriate.

Although she has only treated dogs and cats so far, Dr. Gordon said the most unusual animals she has treated in her veterinary practice have been a domesticated skunk, and a heron colony. As Willow Creek Animal Hospital continues to expand its services, the day may come when she'll be walking a skunk on the treadmill. Dr. Gordon and Willow Creek encourage referrals from the veterinary practices in Berks County, and would be happy to talk with other practitioners about their new service, and how they can help other practices treat their patients more effectively.

If you have or know of a local practice you think should be spotlighted in future issues of the HSBC Vet Connection, please email Education Manager Emily Branch at ebbranch@talon.net.

AMONG THE MOST COMMON CONDITIONS THAT RESPOND TO REHABILITATIVE THERAPY ARE:

- **Osteoarthritis.** As animals compensate, they change the way they walk, affecting the opposite leg, and also reducing muscle mass of the affected leg. Therapy helps these animals move better, longer.
- **Orthopedic surgery:** The underwater treadmill permits the post-operative animal to walk on the injured leg earlier, hastening a return to normal function.
- **Intervertebral disk disease:** After back surgery, a combined program of electric stimulation and underwater treadmill helps dogs re-learn to walk. Deep water work provides great low-impact resistance training for overweight dogs.



Missy Kehler (L) and Dr. Erin Gordon (R) work out on the balance ball.



The dog is Dyna, an American Pit Bull Terrier owned by Missy Kehler.

**LISTED BELOW ARE ITEMS NEEDED BY THE
HUMANE SOCIETY OF BERKS COUNTY.**

**PLEASE LET US KNOW IF YOU HAVE
SOMETHING ON THE LIST TO DONATE OR ARE
ABLE TO PURCHASE AN ITEM FOR THE
HUMANE SOCIETY OF BERKS COUNTY.**

ANIMAL CARE SERVICES AND PROGRAM NEEDS

Cat Litter
Stainless Steel Water and Food Bowls
Sanitizable Pet Toys (Kong, etc.)
Cleaning Supplies
(Buckets, Scrub Brushes, Brooms, Commercial Mops, Windex)
Laundry Supplies (Laundry Detergent, Bleach)
Wash Cloths, Towels, and Blankets
Industrial/Commercial Washers and Dryers
New Chevrolet Cargo Van for Ambulance Refitting
Veterinary Services and Supplies
Havahart Traps
Upgraded HVAC Units for Catteries
Laptop Computer & PowerPoint Projector

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION AND FACILITY NEEDS

Copy Paper and General Office Supplies
(Pens, Staples & Staplers, Post-It Notes, Paper Clips)
Ink Cartridges for HP Printers
(LaserJet 1200, Inkjet 940, Color LaserJet 2550L)
Flat Screen Computer Monitors
Postage (.24 & .39)
Interior and Exterior Plants and Landscaping
Facilities Renovation
Roofing Replacement
Heavy Duty Extension Cords (25 Ft. +) and Power Strips
Printing Services
Gift Cards for Wal-Mart, Target, Staples, Office Max, etc.

OTHER IMPORTANT NEEDS

Guests for our free, leave-your-check-books-at-home,
1 hour Welcome Waggin'
Tours
Table Captains

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

ONGOING:

Welcome Waggin' tours (contact the HSBC for dates)

SECOND FRIDAY OF EVERY MONTH:

HSBC Furry Friday Open House (6:00 – 8:00 PM)

SUNDAY, JUNE 4TH:

Skyline Drive Corvette Show, 11-4, at the shelter

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14:

BCTV Program (Live), 6:30 PM

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 30:

2006 Walk for the Animals & Walktoberfest

HUMANE SOCIETY ANNOUNCES PARTNERSHIP WITH VCA ANIMAL HOSPITALS

On January 15, 2006, the Humane Society of Berks County announced an innovative new partnership with VCA Animal Hospitals that will provide follow up veterinary care for animals adopted at the Humane Society of Berks County. The program will provide free examinations of adopted pets at any of the three Berks County VCA Animal Hospital locations within five days of adoption, free treatment during the first two weeks following adoption for many common illnesses, and discounts on treatment costs for uncovered illnesses and diagnostic testing.

“We are really excited that we are able to offer these benefits to our adopters,” said Karel Minor, HSBC Executive Director. Although the Humane Society has long offered free physical exams through some area veterinary practices, including the VCA hospitals, this new partnership offers far more extensive benefits. The Humane Society of Berks County is the first and only animal shelter in Pennsylvania to partner with VCA in this program, which is in place in several dozen other shelters throughout the country. By providing treatment for basic illnesses that can often appear due to the stress of kenneling and adoption, the Humane Society hopes to decrease the number of adoption returns due to illness.

The HSBC previously had a similar but much more limited program in place. Because such a limited number of veterinarians chose to participate in the complimentary exam program and because the VCA program offered substantially more coverage for the 2,000 cats and dogs adopted each year at the Humane Society, the HSBC decided to enter into the exclusive partnership with VCA. “We truly appreciate all of the support we receive from the veterinary community, particularly from the five other practices who participated in the previous program,” said Minor. “We’re fortunate to continue to have the support of a wide group of practices through our sterilization clinic, off site vaccination clinics, and special events.”

The complete adoption health program packet is available for download at www.berkshumane.org. For more information about the adoption health program or getting involved with the Humane Society of Berks County, please contact Executive Director Karel Minor at 610-921-2348, ext. 10, or at kminor@talon.net.

HAVE A SENIOR CITIZEN CLIENT INTERESTED IN ADOPTING A CAT?

Tell them about the HSBC’s “Free to a Good Senior Citizen Home” program! The Humane Society has expanded its hugely successful “Free to a Good Home” program to help find homes for adult, sterilized cats. Any senior citizen (65 years and over) is eligible to receive a free adoption of an adult, already sterilized cat. All normal adoption procedures and requirements apply: however, the adoption and all the normal services are provided at no charge.

The “Free to a Good Home” program was created last summer to help get adult cats adopted during the overcrowded summer kitten season. Thanks to this innovative program, not a single cat was euthanized for space last summer for the first time in decades at the HSBC. By expanding this program to seniors year round, we hope to build on that success.