



by Annette Walker '88

AT SOME POINT IN OUR LIVES, most of us eventually have to make decisions regarding life-care for a family member. For many of us, that family extends to our pets. These companion animals—their unconditional love and faithful friendship a staple in our lives—depend on us as they, and we, move into those oft-mentioned twilight years. Located in College Station, The Stevenson Companion Animal Life-Care Center—a privately-funded program of the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at Texas A&M University—is the only facility of its kind in the Southwest that provides long-term care for pets whose owners can no longer care for them due to illness or death. The center also fosters educational experiences for Texas A&M veterinary students by providing opportunities in which they can attend to the care and needs of companion animals.>>



TOP: Leah Vance DVM '07 and Babe
LEFT: Jordan Spier '07 with Chip and T.C.
RIGHT: Martha Spear '07 and Charlie

Stevenson
Companion Animal Life-Care Center





The 8,300 square-foot Stevenson Center is located on the university campus, near the veterinary complex.

WELCOME HOME

As the mandatory doorbell chimes its announcement of a visitor to the Stevenson Companion Animal Life-Care Center, the sound of several barking dogs penetrates through the door. Initially, it might cause one to step back, but once the door is opened, it is instantly clear that no “beware of dog”—or any other animal—sign is needed here. The sweetly-frenzied greeting immediately brings a smile to one’s face and a warm feeling to the heart. These are animals that are happy, thriving and completely comfortable in their home-environment.

First to greet most visitors is a little bit of a dog, dancing around but bounding through and under the feet of five dogs at least 10 times her size. With steadfast conviction, Happy—as she is aptly named—a 6-year-old Chihuahua, butts up to the front of the pack just waiting to be picked up. Right behind her—actually, standing over her—is Chip, a 9-year-old terrier mix with a blue bandana around his neck. Baby, an affectionate 14-year-old Catahoula mix, saunters up slowly but is nevertheless interested in making just as much fuss. And, rounding



Kim Muth, a full-time animal caretaker, gets some petting time in with Annabelle in one of the cat rooms.

out the greeting party is Angel, a 12-year-old Shih Tzu who still has quite a few puppy-like attributes that belie her advanced age and Babe, a 10-year-old black Labrador Retriever who calmly sits down to take in all the excitement.

Just another day at the center and this is all just right inside the door. “Every day at the center, whenever we get a visitor, this scenario plays itself out,”

says Dr. Henry L. “Sonny” Presnal ’57, director of the center. “I think it makes everyone feel special, but these animals are the special ones. They love being here and they love visitors. I’m not sure who has more fun during this activity—our resident animals or the visitors.”

Indeed. These five dogs are residents at the Stevenson Companion Animal Life-Care Center. They, along with eight other dogs, nine cats and one llama—yes llama—are the current inhabitants of this innovative center.

A VETERINARIAN’S DREAM

Founded and dedicated in 1993, the center was the dream of Dr. Ned Ellett ’61, former head of the Small Animal Clinic of the College of Veterinary Medicine at Texas A&M University. His dedication, along with generous donations from an individual donor, Madlin Stevenson and the W.P. and Bulah Luse Foundation, combined to make the center a reality. The center is named after Stevenson and the building is named the Luse Building in honor of the Luse Foundation.

“We’re very proud of our facility,” explains Presnal. “Our current on-site housing consists of an 8,300 square-

“This really is a top-notch facility... the fact that it is the only facility of its kind in the Southwest is definitely a source of pride for Texas A&M and the College of Veterinary Medicine.”

foot building with special areas for the resident pets to rest and play and five separate fenced yards. We want to provide our residents with the comforts of home, to allow them to roam freely, lounge on comfortable furniture, play in exercise yards or snooze on the sun porch. This is their home, not a just a boarding facility. There's also a barn with individual stalls, shade trees and a paddock and pasture for the large animal residents.”

Presnal, who joined the center in 1998, has 27 years of experience as a veterinarian in private practice and an extensive background in business and finance. He is responsible for the overall operation of the center and directing its policies and future development. Presnal received dual bachelor's degrees in veterinary science and animal husbandry and his doctorate in veterinary medicine from Texas A&M.

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

The center includes two apartments for four Texas A&M students who, live on-site to ensure 24-hour care and company for the residents.

These students are typically aspiring veterinarians and a great asset to the center. Additionally, other student workers assist with housekeeping and grooming chores throughout the week. Since the students live at the center, they are responsible for the residents on evenings, weekends and staff holidays. There is a formal dining room that students are allowed to use for family and friends as well as a visitation room used for studying and pleasure. Many evenings after dinner, the students are joined by many of the resident dogs and cats to sit back and

enjoy watching television or videos. There is also a computer in the living area that the students are allowed to use as well.

“In 2004,” explains Ellie Greenbaum, assistant to Presnal at the center, “There was an addition to the original building that added the second apartment for our students, a sitting area, two cat rooms with cat condos, bedding, windows and doors that lead to a memorial garden. Additionally, three new dog living areas—each equipped with kennels to allow privacy during feeding times and sleeping, futons to rest on and its own pet door for free access to the outside play areas, were added as well as an aviary room for our feathered residents.” Greenbaum continues, “The memorial garden area in-between the original building and add-on is not only beautiful with its landscaping and fountain, but will eventually provide a>>

ENROLLMENT STATISTICS FOR THE STEVENSON CENTER

- 307 pets owned by 117 owners from 20 states and one country outside the United States in the center's program; and 30 new pets enrolled in the program to date in 2007.
- Comprising the 307 pets enrolled are 153 dogs, 130 cats, 14 horses, eight birds and two miniature donkeys.

STEVENSON CENTER WISH LIST

The center is always happy to receive donations. Items continually in demand include:

- Dog beds and toys
- Cat beds and toys
- Grooming equipment and supplies
- Throw blankets for couches and chairs

To make a donation, please go to www.cvm.tamu.edu/petcare or call (979) 845-1188.



Happy and Jet get along despite their size difference.



ABOVE: Fourth-year veterinary students come by the center for a tour.

location for the cremated remains of all our previous pet residents who have passed on.”

A grooming lounge area—where most of the interaction between pet residents and staff takes place—has futons, chairs and pet beds scattered throughout. Bathing and grooming, meal preparation—each pet is on a measured amount of food selected for each based on their dietary needs—and a doorway to a patio and backyard provide a comfortable area for both the pet residents and their caretakers.

A cat room in the original building is set up for free-access to the house through removable windows into the grooming and lounge areas, but dogs are not able to get into the cat area as some cats don’t like dogs. “We do have a few cats that aren’t fond of dogs and vice-versa and this arrangement allows for those scenarios as well,” says Greenbaum, “Although most of our residents are very content with each other.” There is a three-sided glass enclosed sunroom, donated by Stevenson, that stays warm for the cats with a full view of the backyard and bird feeder—a plush arrangement for these lucky cats.

“This really is a top-notch facility,” says Presnal. “And the fact that it is the only facility of its kind in the

Southwest is definitely a source of pride for Texas A&M and the College of Veterinary Medicine.”

CONTINUING VETERINARY EXCELLENCE

As an integral part of the Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, the Stevenson Center is located adjacent to the college near the veterinary complex. The Community Practice Services in the Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital of the college is responsible for coordinating the veterinary care of all the animals in the program. Each animal receives a very thorough physical examination prior to entering the center and receives regular exams, all immunizations, lab work, heartworm and flea prevention and dental checkups. Each pet receives a microchip implant for identification upon arrival at the center. The medical care and individual attention received by the animals in the program combine to create the ultimate in companion animal life care. But of course, providing such excellent care—a hallmark of the Texas A&M veterinary program—also necessitates the demand for funding.

“The center receives no public funding,” explains Presnal. “It is

dependent upon private, individual endowments and gifts. Each animal enrolled in the center requires a minimum endowment that is managed and invested by the Texas A&M Foundation. The income from the endowment provides the financial support necessary for the care of the pet.”

Many donors have provided support far in excess of the minimum endowment. Any additional support allows you the opportunity to not only provide for your pets, but to make a lasting contribution to the center and the college.

Dr. Marvin Cannon and his wife, Anita, have enrolled their pets in the program. “It gave us not only the opportunity to care for our animals,” says Anita. “But even if they never go there, the endowment will go to the Texas A&M veterinary school to provide educational opportunities for future veterinary students.”

Presnal agrees. “These endowments provide so much, not only for the future of the donors’ pets, but the college as well. The income from the endowment can be diverted toward other endeavors within the college after the pet is deceased, or even if pet passes before they come to the center,” Presnal continues. “And that’s where the expressed wishes of the donor are completed—to provide funding towards scholarships, research or any area of interest in the college.”

Presnal encourages those interested in the program to come

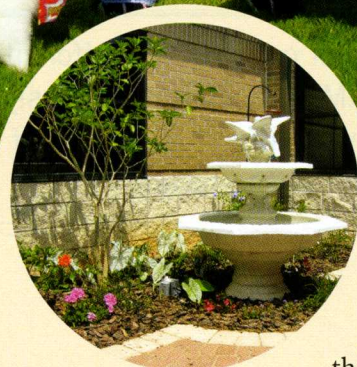


Kaitlin Waltrip '09, a second-year student worker at the center helps Jet with his wheelchair. At 15, Jet still wants to play with the others, but just needs a little help.



ABOVE: Janet Broadhead '86, veterinary technician for the center, enjoys a play date with some of the residents on a beautiful day.

RIGHT: A memorial garden area in-between the original building will eventually provide a location for the cremated remains of all our previous pet residents who have passed on.



visit the center. "I wish more people would stop by to see and tour the center. Our promotional items and Web site are informative, but they can't convey the true feeling of exactly what a special place this really is," he continues. "When people come here, they are truly amazed at the center and how personable and professional it is. It really is just like going home—it is our pet's home. Our pets are happy and adjusted; our staff love being here and there's such a positive connection with the center and its ramifications for the Texas A&M Veterinary College, I want as many people to come see for themselves. And we welcome them."

Enrollment in the center is very easy—requiring a one-time non-refundable fee, pet-owner agreement and the method of endowment established. There are three advantages to early enrollment for a pet or pets in the Stevenson Center:

- It secures a slot in the program for a pet—that is transferable to another pet; and
- It locks in the minimum endowment requirement based on the age of the youngest owner at the time of enrollment; and
- It allows a provision to take care of the pet on an interim basis if the owner becomes incapacitated or hospitalized. The center does not yet own the pet and it can be returned to the owner.

Currently, the center holds 23 pet residents. At one point it had 30 animals and has a capacity of 50–60. "With the expansion a few years ago, our capabilities allow us to serve even more animals", said Greenbaum. "We would definitely be pleased—and are prepared—to receive more animals now and in the future."

Presnal concurs. "We are pleased at the progress the Stevenson Companion Animal Life-Care Center has made from the initial dream of Ned Ellet to what we have today. The connection of the success of this innovative and unique facility and our ability to care for these animals—many of which would have had no where to go after their owners passed—is not lost on the fact that it is a part of the Texas A&M Veterinary College," continues Presnal. "The college's reputation for excellence is just another reason this type of center has been so successful. And, the fact that it is the only one of its kind in the Southwest is another source of pride for Texas A&M."

For more information on the Stevenson Companion Animal Life-Care Center, and to learn more about enrollment or schedule a visit to the center, go to www.cvm.tamu.edu/petcare or call (979) 845-1188.