

# best friends NEWSLETTER

Fall 2012

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## WE DID IT!



After many years of hard work and generous support, from our many board members, donors and volunteers, our dream has finally become a reality. On Thursday, September 20, 2012, the new Mona Campbell Centre for Animal Cancer was officially opened.

**You made this happen. You raised the funds. Thank you.**

## LOVE!

In order to find cures, we need your help to fund cures. Give generously to OVC Pet Trust. Help the pets we love live longer, healthier lives. OVC Pet Trust is grateful for your support.



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# From the Board:

Dr. Mary DeCaire

The day after the Animal Cancer Centre opening felt like the day after a wedding. It was a tremendously collaborative effort and a dream long in the making. Participating in the development was the accomplishment of a volunteer's lifetime, even though I can only take a tiny slice of the credit.

The Animal Cancer Centre was a natural choice for a capital project, and I hope that its impact will be widespread. I know that it will open the eyes of practitioners and pet owners as to what is available for their animals—and that cancer is not a death sentence.

I hope the centre will pair with human cancer institutions in line with growing understanding that there really isn't a line between companion animals and people. Cancer is cancer. With this in mind,

the Animal Cancer Centre will build on the success of Guelph's Institute for Comparative Cancer Investigation, operating as its clinical arm.

Following the grand opening, the board must ask the question: What are we going to do now? That answer, however, will come from a new Board Chair, who will take over in Spring 2013.

It's been my pleasure to work with a wonderfully dedicated Board of Trustees that goes above and beyond, each contributing in their own way. Back in 2005, when I first joined the board, I did not realize that such a huge percentage of the companion animal research that goes on in our province is funded by Pet Trust. One of the reasons why my work with the organization has been so rewarding is that it's easy to see the results of the time and effort

put forth. I see funded studies firsthand and think, wow, that's going to be information I can use in my own veterinary practice in a year or two.

As a vet, there's a gratification in seeing these clinically useful studies and knowing that Pet Trust helps me offer my patients the very best. While I will be stepping down from the board, I remain committed to the cause and am looking forward to seeing what is next for Pet Trust.

None of this would be possible without our tremendously generous donor base, and I'd like to thank all our supporters for all that they do. It's been an honour to work with you to further companion animal health.



Cancer survivor Winston McKay awaits his ribbon-cutting duties.



Pet Trust Donor Wall



Left to right: Sandy Bell, Dr. Joanne Best, Stu Lang, Susie Bell, Kim Lang, Pet Trust Chair, Dr. Mary DeCaire, and Pet Trust Managing Director - Karen Scott.

# Alice the Cat—A New Beginning

The Emergency (ICU) unit of the Ontario Veterinary College can, by its very nature, be a heart-breaking and tension-filled place. Still out of illness and trauma, miracles can occur. Such was the case with a calico cat named Alice.

Born under a house to a feral mother, little Alice had been rescued by Mary Savage of Guelph. As she grew, she tamed, but remained reclusive and distant. Trips to the veterinarian were especially stressful for Alice, so Mary prepared for the usual Alice angst when she packed kitty off for a check-up and vaccination visit to her local clinic.

Routine took a turn for the unexpected when Alice went limp and became unconscious after the vaccination. "She was showing symptoms of anaphylactic shock," recalls Mary. The veterinarian acted quickly, administering oxygen and starting an IV drip, but beyond this, he knew the cat's life was in danger.

Beyond his expertise, the veterinarian called the Emergency Department at the Ontario Veterinary College. Within minutes, Alice, Mary Savage and a Veterinary Technician were on their way to OVC.

## Alice's Critical Condition

When Alice and her worried human arrived at their door, the ICU team acted immediately.

Over the next hour, as Mary waited, staff members regularly came out to the reception room and gave her updates. At one point she was invited into the treatment room. "I could hardly believe the team around Alice," recalls Mary. "There were at least five staff, including Dr. Holowaychuk all working on saving her life."

All signs pointed to the cat having had a

severe allergic reaction to the vaccination that had been administered at her veterinarian's office.

Alice remained in ICU for seven days, during which time Mary received regular phone updates and was encouraged to visit her pet daily. "I was never anything but amazed at the attention and care that she was receiving."

Before Alice was discharged to home, Mary needed to be instructed on her home care, including how to use a feeding tube. This would be Alice's source of nutrition for a time. Mary credits ICU senior student Catherine Sabino (working at the ICU in a Pet Trust funded position) for her expert instructions.

## An Unexpected Change

Alice the calico cat returned home a very high-needs patient. "ICU couldn't promise that she wasn't brain-damaged given what she had been through," recalls Mary Savage. "They indicated that I might have a pet with a significant disability."

The first weeks after Alice's discharge were tentative ones for both the pet and owner. "She was blind at this stage and could only creep around the house," remembers Mary.

Still the OVC staff kept in close touch with their patient's condition and scheduled regular check-ups. "And they treated her like a star when she came in," laughs Mary.

## Gradual Recovery

Slowly, Alice's condition improved as she regained her sight, strength and appetite.

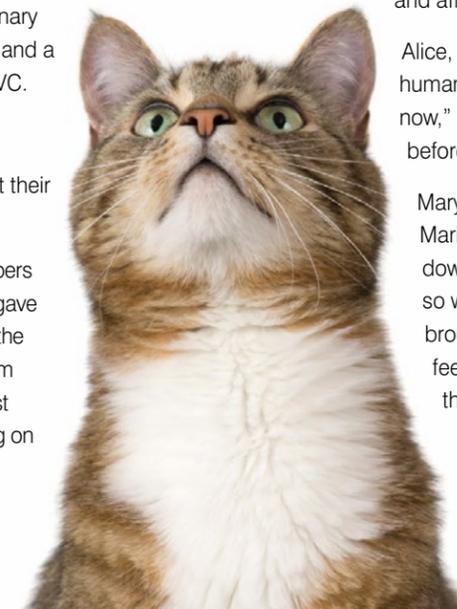
But something was different. "Her personality was quite altered to what it had been before," states Mary. She has a theory.

"Having had no human socialization in her very early days, she really was an aloof and unfriendly cat. But when she 'died' and came back to life on the table at ICU, she was surrounded by people 24 hours a day. And they gave her the attention and affection to develop normally socially."

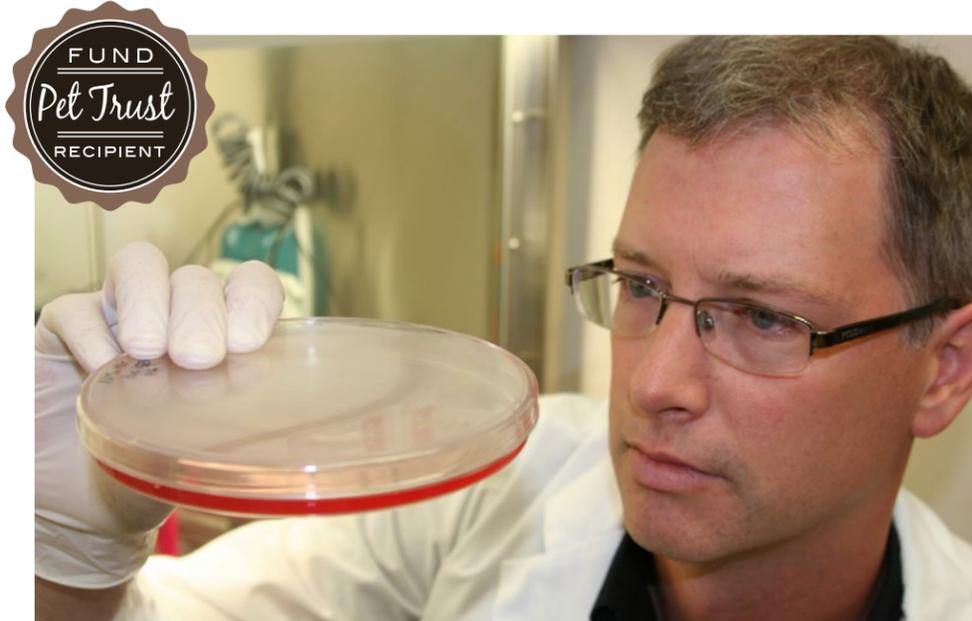
Alice, the miracle cat is now friendly and affectionate with her human. "She'll greet me at the door, sit on my lap and purr now," says Mary. "The 'old' Alice would never have done this before her illness."

Mary Savage has nothing but praise and admiration for Dr. Marie Holowaychuk and her ICU staff. Dr. Holowaychuk plays down the praise. "We all have pets and we all love our pets, so we can identify when a beloved member of the family is brought into our care." She also states that ICU veterinarians feel a significant responsibility to their human clients to make them feel "emotionally safe" even in a clinical setting.

Pet Trust helped to fund and support the renovations at ICU, while another Pet Trust donor funded much needed equipment. The result is a state-of-the-art ICU facility capable of handling such clients as Alice.



# Redefining Optimal: Questioning conventional radiation dosing



Tony Mutsaers studies tumour.

The challenge with all radiation therapy is how to eradicate cancerous cells without injuring any surrounding tissue. To combat this, conventional treatment uses small, frequent doses over a length of time, the equivalent of using a screwdriver to knock down a wall... slowly. Technological advances, however, have greatly reduced the risk to surrounding tissues, which has made Assistant Professor Tony Mutsaers wonder if it's time to start using something more powerful. Say, a sledgehammer.

"We're asking the question," says Mutsaers, "are there types of tumours that would be better served by delivering the same total dosage of radiation, but in greater amounts in a shorter timeframe?"

"Pet Trust funded a tumour banking initiative that plays into the success of this study because we have the infrastructure and expertise to get the samples and create the cell lines," continues Mutsaers. "We've selected three types of dog tumours that we often deal with in the Animal Cancer Centre: melanoma, mast cell tumour and anal sac carcinoma."

The canine cancers were chosen for their frequency and for the challenges they present to clinicians. Melanoma and anal sac tumours are infamous for spreading to lymph nodes and other organs, while mast cell tumours can be unpredictable and often reoccur after excision.

Samples of all three tumours will be collected from biopsies as part of routine clinical exams and then cell colonies will be grown before being exposed to different levels of radiation.

**“The funding from the OVC Pet Trust is allowing us to answer some important questions that will feed back into the clinic and will provide data for the bigger picture.”**

As a clinician scientist, Mutsaers is in a rare position to make use of his findings soon after completing the study. "The results may show us that the radiation dosing and schedules we are using are optimal," he explains. "But if we find that fewer, higher doses have better outcomes, we can start using that approach and organize a clinical investigation. We could do that within months of having the data."

One of the advances that makes Mutsaers' research possible is OVC's new linear accelerator (linac), one of only three or four similar units in use in veterinary medicine in Canada. There are other machines that can, essentially, create a custom stencil of a tumour to deliver radiation without affecting surrounding tissue, but OVC's linac has features that make treatment even more exact. "This particular unit is equipped with onboard imaging, which allows for modification of the table position," explains Mutsaers. "There are day-to-day variations in tumour position, even when the patient is under anesthesia. With the onboard imaging, we can compensate for that small amount of movement and change the machine each time to correspond to the position of the animal. This makes it possible to consider delivering higher radiation doses."

Mutsaers is optimistic that his study will lead to improved treatment options for all three cancers. "The funding from the OVC Pet Trust is allowing us to answer some important questions that will feed back into the clinic and will provide data for the bigger picture." Beyond its implications for canine radiation therapy, testing conventional approaches may also lead to more effective treatment in other species and in humans. "There are so many strengths to the clinical oncology we practice with dogs and a growing awareness of the potential for our research to answer questions of broader clinical relevance," says Mutsaers. "It's exciting to be right in the centre of it."

## Pet Trust research competition

*Pet Trust received 17 preproposals in the Winter 2012 research competition. The following research projects were funded:*

**Dr. Dorothee Bienzle, Pathobiology:** Improved classification and prognostication of canine leukemia

**Dr. Byram Bridle, Pathobiology:** Assessment of the potential to treat canine lymphoma with an oncolytic vaccine

**Dr. Brenda Coomber, Biomedical Sciences:** Exploration of the anti-cancer impact of Itraconazole on signaling in canine mast cell cancer cells

**Dr. Brenda Coomber, Biomedical Sciences:** Using ribosomal RNA disruption as a predictor of early relapse in canine lymphoma

**Dr. Karol Mathews, Clinical Studies:** Antimicrobial activity of raw honey against common and multi-drug resistant bacteria of wounds in cats and dogs

**Dr. Michael Meehan, Population Medicine:** Evaluation of the OVC Pet Loss Support Hotline: Grief and the Human-Animal Bond

**Dr. Tony Mutsaers, Clinical Studies:** Quantification of the radiosensitivity and the ability to repair radiation-induced injury of three common canine tumours

**Dr. Tony Mutsaers, Clinical Studies:** The effect of

chemotherapy on circulating bone marrow-derived progenitor cell populations in canine cancer patients – a pilot study

**Dr. Ameet Singh, Clinical Studies:** Characterization of Biofilm Production by Staphylococcus pseudintermedius using in vitro and ex vivo techniques

**Dr. Adronie Verbrugge, Clinical Studies:** Vitamin D status in canine cancer patient and the relationship with dietary vitamin D intake

**Dr. Scott Weese, Pathobiology:** Is minocycline a treatment option for multidrug resistant methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus pseudintermedius (MRSP)

**Dr. Paul Woods, Clinical Studies:** PET-CT investigation of the biological response to toceranib (Palladia) treatment of mast cell tumours in dogs

**Dr. Tony Yu:** Measurement of topical antifungal sensitivity for use in the treatment of Malassezia otitis externa

**Total Funds Awarded:  
\$212,105**

## Building Better Vets Through Volunteerism

Every fall, a fresh cohort of volunteers meets with OVC Assistant Professor Michael Meehan in hopes of working with the OVC Pet Loss Support Hotline. A mix of current and prospective veterinary students, they commit their time to helping grieving pet owners and to learning about the human-animal bond.

"It's a rare opportunity," say Meehan. "Although several pet loss support hotlines operate across North America, we're the only Canadian one affiliated with a teaching institution. Students interested in veterinary clinical practice have the opportunity to see if the profession is a right fit."

Before volunteers can answer their first phone call, they receive extensive preparation via active listening workshops and through exploring special veterinary counselling topics, such as dealing with euthanasia and recognizing cues for when clients may need referrals to other mental health agencies. Meehan says the rigorous training program is essential to maintaining service integrity.

"Many people who call the hotline are vulnerable—they lack emotional or social support. A lot of the callers are older people, often female, and tend to be living on their own, without a wide social network or are geographically separated from their support system. So when faced with losing a pet, they face losing their closest companions."

The extent to which a pet's death affects the owner depends on the emotional bond and the surrounding circumstances.

"Research tells us that the grief people experience when they lose a pet can be very similar in degree and intensity to losing a human partner," Meehan says. "A pet's violent death, such as being hit by a car or attacked by another animal, can exacerbate that grief." Equipping veterinary candidates with this knowledge can help them support their clients and reduce the likelihood of severe grief.

"In the last ten years, there's been a tremendous shift in the focus from providing veterinary students with technical skills alone," explains Meehan. "Opportunities like volunteering with the hotline help students hone the communication skills they will need in clinical practice." Meehan is able to feed the insights gained from the program directly into his teaching curriculum.

He's grateful to the OVC Pet Trust for their funding of both the service and his study. "I think it's tremendous that the OVC Pet Trust's mandate is both to prolong animals' lives and to support and maintain the human-animal bond. There is a beautiful consequence to funding treatments to help pets live longer—our attachment to them also lasts longer and can be deeper. So it's nice that while OVC Pet Trust spends money in the one area, they're also building supports for when that bond gets cut."



**Passion Doesn't Take a Vacation**

*“No matter how dark the day, at some point, there will be blue sky.”*

Those are the words of Suzi Beber, the unstoppable force behind Smiling Blues Skies, a fund Suzi started after facing her own personal adversities.

At thirty-eight, Suzi Beber suffered severe complications following what was supposed to be a routine hospital procedure. “Life as I knew it ended on one day,” remembers Suzi. “I went from being a high school vice-principal to learning how to do the basics, like walking, all over again.”

Enter an extraordinary golden retriever, Blues, that Suzi and her partner, Tommy, adopted during her recovery in 1998.

“Blues gave me a new life,” explains Suzi. “He opened doors after others had closed. If I was using my walker or scooter on my own, people didn't notice me. When Blues was with me, everyone wanted to talk to us. He became the sun and moon and stars.”

Unfortunately, like one in four dogs, and a staggering 60% of golden retrievers, Blues was diagnosed with cancer in 2000. The news of Blues' lymphoma blindsided Suzi, as he was still a young dog, very much in his prime. He passed away that year.

In her customary way, Suzi went in search of the blue sky again. “I wanted to find a way to make Blues' life meaningful,” she explains. “But I knew whatever I did, it was important for people to understand that it wasn't about one dog or one cat or one person, it was about all of us.”

Blues' life became the inspiration for Smiling Blue Skies, a fund dedicated to combating cancer in companion animals and supporting owners dealing with pet illness. Suzi started the fund to honour the memory of Blues and to help fund research, as well as resources, connections, and counseling to owners dealing with a pet's cancer diagnosis. Because Blues had

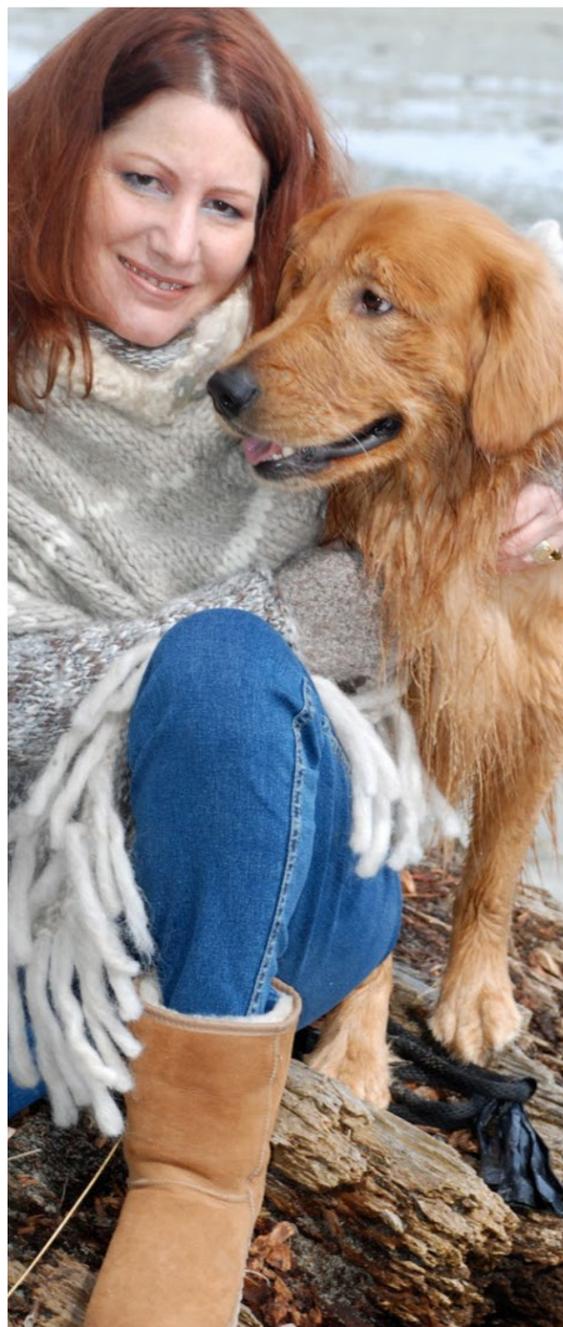
been treated at Guelph's Ontario Veterinary College, Suzi felt that OVC's Pet Trust, whose mission matched her passion, was the perfect recipient for the monies raised through the fund.

They say that passion is contagious and Smiling Blue Skies is no exception. What began as a memorial to a treasured pet has since evolved into a cross-country team of supporters. “People have made it their own,” Suzi says proudly.

In addition to a robust team of volunteers at events, contributors to the fund range from corporate donations, tip jar drives at grooming salons, dog organizations, such as the Canadian Agility championships, and the ever-popular fundraising walks. Since every dollar raised goes directly to the OVC Pet Trust, Suzi makes sure organizers, volunteers and donors feel appreciated.

Eleven years on, Suzi still feels like Blues is close at hand. She is grateful for partner Tommy's work and support behind the scenes, enabling her to whole-heartedly dedicate herself to the cause. She and Tommy live on the West Coast with four golden retrievers, including Blues' grandson Riley, a therapy dog and one of the country's top agility dogs. Riley is Suzi's constant companion and expands her life in much the same way Blues did.

And while lymphoma did claim Blues, there is hope that the research and treatment funded by Smiling Blue Skies might help to spare other dogs from a similar fate. And that is just the blue sky Suzi wishes for all companion animals.



Suzi Beber with Blue's grandson Riley.

Six degrees of separation has never been more exciting for The Smiling Blue Skies® Cancer Fund.

Who knew that a friendship that began with Ontario's Canadian Golden Retriever Adoption Service, and a very special rescue dog named “Chance,” would lead to a reunion 13 years later, at the Agility Association of Canada's National Championships in Nanaimo, British Columbia? It was a treat to see Sharon and Bob Ransom after all those years, and amazing to think that agility had become so central to our lives, and that Smiling Blue Skies would play such an integral role in the close relationships that touch both Sharon and me.

Who knew that Sharon would become an agility judge and have one of Robin and Craig Eagleson's puppies? (Remember the amazing story of Robin and Craig's “Bogey the Wonder Dog,” one of only 12 dogs selected to represent Canada at the World Championships of Agility in 2008?)

Over \$10,000 was raised at the 12th Annual Agility Association of Canada's (AAC) National Agility Championships, thanks to our very first “Sponsor a Dog” on-line giving programme and a sale of Smiling Blue Skies Jewelry. The generosity of so many participants enabled the purchase of a surgical oncology lighting package.

Who knew that a chance meeting with Vancouver Island photographer, Linda Matteson-Reynolds, would lead to the creation of inspirational posters, featuring people's

dogs, that benefit The Smiling Blue Skies Cancer Fund?

I never tire of telling people that we are celebrating TEN years of Smiling Blue Skies Walks to End Canine Cancer. We are on the cusp of inaugural walks in both Victoria and Toronto. Calgary's walk raised over \$35,000 and Bradford's first annual walk raised over \$14,000. Amazing!

That brings us back to our Six Degrees of Separation. Tania Costa, the owner of the Canine Wellness Centre, located in East York, weaves her own special magic, from the agility world to the pet sitting and walking world and even to Toronto's K9 Police Unit. I discovered Tania was connected to Kelly Manis, owner of “Kelly's Dog Walking and Pet Sitting,” and Commander in Chief of the Toronto Walk. And then, when Kelly spoke to a member of Toronto's K9 Police Unit about the walk, it turned out that the officer is a client of Tania's. It was exciting to learn that the K9 Police Unit will be making an appearance at the Toronto Walk on Saturday September, 29.

Smiling Blue Skies joins us all together, as we continue to help OVC to find more and better ways to deal with and treat cancer in our companion animals. We are in this together, and I will never tire of looking at blue, blue skies, where hope is a kite, and dreams of a world without cancer, really can come true!

**Calgary's walk raised over \$35,000 and Bradford's first annual walk raised over \$14,000. Amazing!**

**Working with and through Pet Trust, Smiling Blue Skies has generously supported many OVC initiatives in a variety of areas including...**

**A study to validate a blood screening test for Hemangiosarcoma, a highly aggressive canine cancer.**

**Lighting equipment for veterinary oncologists at the Mona Campbell Centre for Animal Cancer.**

**The development of North America's first cancer registry for companion animals.**

**The investigation of novel cancer treatment and approaches, providing much-needed seed money that can be difficult to obtain from traditional grants.**

**To date, Smiling Blue Skies has raised \$1 Million.**



George and Susan Cohon with dogs Tilly and Simmy.

## Lending a helping paw

*There's a new pair of caregivers making the rounds at Toronto's Ronald McDonald House and Baycrest Hospital. They're not doctors or nurses – they're Tilly and Simmy, a mother-daughter team of golden retriever therapy dogs. Holding their leashes is George Cohon, the gregarious founder of McDonald's restaurants in Canada and Russia. He and his wife, Susan, make a point of bringing the dogs to care facilities a few times each week.*

"The dogs bring a lot of happiness to a lot of different people," Pet Trust supporter George Cohon says. "For example, there is one little girl—about three years old—and she undergoes chemotherapy every day. She could be tired and exhausted, but the day that we bring the dogs, she makes it her business to come down and walk Tilly on a lead."

When the Cohons adopted Tilly, they hadn't initially considered enlisting her in therapy work. They became intrigued when a friend in Florida introduced them to Pet Partners, an organization that helps train potential therapy dogs. To become certified, dogs have to pass a rigorous three-stage test that includes a visit to a grade one classroom. "The teacher introduces the dog," Cohon says, "and all of a sudden there are twenty or thirty six-year-old kids all over the dog, pulling at her tail, pulling at her ears. Tilly just stayed calm." A few years later they adopted one of her offspring, Simmy, who had already been through a different training program.

The Cohons started with visits at Toronto's Baycrest Hospital, but soon expanded their reach to include the new Ronald McDonald House and two facilities near their Florida vacation home.

Part of the reason why therapy animals can be so effective is that they are non-threatening. With the dogs, patients can let their guard down without fear of being judged or rejected. "The dogs don't want anything in return," says Cohon. "They are very loving and caring. They go into a hospital with a senior who's been in bed and the dog goes up to the bed and puts her face right next to where the patient's hand is."

The pluses to the dogs can be backed by science, says Dr. Jason Coe, OVC Assistant Professor and Nestle Purina PetCare Canada Chair in Communications. "Part of the benefit comes through raising the patient's spirits," he says, "making them feel better, by acting as a bit of a distraction. That alone can help them deal with the day-to-day medical pressures."

Research also shows dogs can facilitate social interactions, something that anyone who has taken a dog to a park can relate to. "Therapy dogs can act as a social lubricant," Coe says. "helping people who may have become a bit withdrawn to open up. It also leaves something for the people to talk about even after the animals have left, which can be particularly important for people in long-term care situations."

There is a growing body of research into the human health benefits of interacting with companion animals. The importance of the human-animal bond is nothing new to Pet Trust, but Coe says that momentum is growing in the greater research community. "It's reached the point where last year a new term, zoeyia, was coined to identify that as an area of investigation."

For Cohon and his wife, the joy the dogs bring is self-evident with every visit.

"I realized it's not just the patients it helps," Cohon says. "It's also the relatives, the caregivers. I've even been at a palliative care centre when a doctor got on his hands and knees to pet the dogs and said, 'Boy I needed you today, Tilly.' God knows what he faced that day. You feel great as the owner being able to do that. We're going to keep doing it as long as we can."

**“The dogs bring a lot of happiness to a lot of different people”**

## OVC Pet Trust

Best Friends of Pet Trust is published by the Ontario Veterinary College for interests of Pet Trust donors and friends. Articles do not necessarily reflect the views of the OVC Pet Trust Board of trustees. Reproduction of material from this newsletter is welcomed.

### OVC Pet Trust

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### Bequests and Planned Giving

One of the greatest feelings is knowing that your gift will live on and keep on giving to help and benefit the health and well being of our beloved companion animals.

A planned gift is a charitable donation that can be arranged during your lifetime to benefit the health and well being of pets in the future.

If you would like to find out more about planned giving and its many forms, please get in touch with us.

**Karen Scott, Managing Director,**  
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