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Monday
October 13, 2008

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Daily News

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TOP OF THE NEWS

LA.COM L1
Doggy's gone to rehab
■ C.A.R.E., the West Coast's only animal rehabilitation center, helps bring pets with physical problems back to health.



BUSINESS A11
Hollywood gets reel
■ Entertainment industry leaders hope the federal bailout plan and tax breaks will prevent films and TV shows from moving out of L.A. like ABC's "Ugly Betty" did.

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pet PROJECT

IT'S REHAB — BUT FOR DOGS, CATS AND OTHERS RECOVERING FROM AN INJURY OR SURGERY

By Melissa Heckscher
Staff Writer

If you didn't know any better, you'd think Sammi was just a typical dog.

But watch him as he trots his way into California Animal Rehabilitation in Santa Monica and you may think differently. The lobby just erupts.

"Sammi!" squeals a receptionist. "Everyone, look! It's Sammi!"

"Hey, Sammi!" exclaims a veterinary technician.

And another: "Sammi's here!"

The thing is, Sammi is C.A.R.E.'s resident miracle. About eight months ago, the 8-year-old springer spaniel — a perky pooch who now bounds up to strangers with an unstoppable wag in his tail — was quadriplegic due to a boney growth in his spine that worsened as he aged.

"All the evidence said he was never going to walk again," said veterinarian Jessica Waldman, who founded C.A.R.E. "I wasn't even sure we could help him."

But they could. And they did.

"They worked and worked and worked with him," said Sammi's owner, Janie Weinstein of Simi Valley. "When I took him home that first week, after he started walking again, I have never in my life seen a dog enjoy being a dog more. It was like he just knew, 'This is what I worked so hard for.'"

It was a best-case scenario for C.A.R.E., the only animal rehabilitation program of its kind on the West Coast.

The clinic, run by Waldman and physical therapist Amy Kramer, uses a multitiered approach to rehabilitation that includes everything from physical therapy and joint manipulation to heat and magnet therapy, massage, acupuncture, hydrotherapy (using an underwater treadmill) and laser treatments.

Cats and dogs with arthritis and bulging disc

REHAB/L3

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>Find out more: For more information about C.A.R.E., go to www.calanimalrehab.com or call (310) 998-2273.

>On the Web: To see a video time line of Sammi's recovery, go to www.youtube.com/user/calanimalrehab07.



Robert Casillas/Staff Photographer

The California Animal Rehabilitation Center in Santa Monica is the only animal rehabilitation center in the Los Angeles area. Therapist Jennifer Nadel hugs Sammi, who was once paralyzed and is now a favorite among employees at the center.







Moseley exercises on the aqua treadmill, left, and with a trainer, center, while physical therapist Amy Kramer, far right, and vet Jessica Waldman work with Becky, trying to regain use of the dog's hind legs.

You wouldn't (or shouldn't) go for a three-mile run without warming up first. And neither should your dog. Here are a few steps you can take to prevent injuries in your pet.

WARM UP

Warm up your pet before strenuous activity. Start with a brisk, 10-minute walk, and cool down for the same amount of time afterward.

LIMIT EXPLOSIVE EXERCISE AND TAKE BREAKS

Any strenuous activity, such as rough play, should be limited to intervals, ideally 10 to 15 minutes at a time. Force your dog to take a break. "A dog in a dog park will push itself beyond what its body can do," said veterinarian Jessica Waldman, founder of California Animal Rehabilitation. "Dogs don't say, 'No, I need a break.'"

BUILD CONTROLLED ENDURANCE

The majority of exercise should be controlled (on a leash, or just no running, jumping or rough play) so that when your pet does strenuous exercise, he is better prepared, similar to how people train for competitions.

BE CAREFUL NOT TO OVERDO IT

Your pet should end a walk at the same pace he begins the walk. If your pet sits down or lags behind on a walk, you are pushing him too far.

SENIOR PETS

As your pet ages, he won't be able to do the same activity he did when he was younger. (Think of a 10-year-old Labrador as a human senior citizen.)

STRETCH YOUR PET

You stretch before and after exercise; why shouldn't your dog?

Try these simple stretches after your pet is warm, and after exercise, to prevent injuries:

Shoulder extension: With your pet lying all the way on its side, keep the front leg straight and progress the whole limb forward until the leg reaches your pet's face. Stop progressing the leg when your pet seems uncomfortable or it is tight. Hold for 15 seconds and repeat three times, once a day.

Hip extension: With your pet lying all the way on its side, keep the hind leg straight and progress the whole limb backward, keeping the leg parallel to the ground. Stop and hold at the point your pet seems uncomfortable or it is tight. Hold for 15 seconds and repeat three times, once a day.

Source: Veterinarian Jessica Waldman



Therapist Amy Kramer performs laser therapy on cat at the California Animal Rehabilitation Center in Santa Monica.

Robert Casillas/ Staff Photographer

REHAB

FROM PAGE L1

injuries make up about 90 percent of the patients at C.A.R.E. Other four-legged (or, unfortunately, three-legged) patients are there to rehabilitate after an injury or surgery.

"Until now, pet owners were left to their own devices to manage a pet's chronic or post-operative pain," said Waldman. "At a certain point, a (traditional) vet has done everything he or she can do."

Waldman, who worked as a doctor at several traditional animal hospitals before founding C.A.R.E., said she couldn't stand seeing otherwise healthy pets be euthanized for mobility problems such as arthritis or hip dysplasia.

"One thing I really never wanted to see is something that could be treated or prevented never getting that treatment," she said.

It turns out, cats and dogs aren't all that different from their owners when it comes to rehabilitation. That is why Waldman brought in a physical therapist who could translate practices traditionally used to rehabilitate people, to animals.

Enter Kramer, who worked as a human physical therapist for about 10 years before her own dog's injury prompted her to pursue a certificate in canine rehabilitation (the only type of credential currently offered for the specialty).

"People want to know, 'What can I do with my dog? My dog still wants to do stuff,'" Kramer said. "Most people's No. 1 complaint is when a dog or cat can't come up the stairs."

But rehabilitation is an expensive undertaking. The initial consultation at C.A.R.E. costs $275, and the recommended eight-week course of twice-weekly therapy costs about $2,000. To help ease the financial burden, C.A.R.E. can give pet owners the tools to rehabilitate their pets at home.

"A lot of the stuff we give them helps keep normal range of motion so they can still function," Kramer said, "so they can still get up off the floor and get around."

While some people might scoff at the idea of spending thousands of dollars on a pet, an emerging demand for veterinary specialists in the U.S. is proving that pet owners don't want to skimp when it comes to taking care of their furry friends.

There are veterinary dermatologists, neurologists, oncologists, allergists, dentists, behaviorists, acupuncturists – virtually any medical specialty out there for humans also exists for their pets.

"It makes sense," Waldman said. "If you want to do the best thing for the pet, you want to go to someone who has a special interest."

Inside C.A.R.E.'s 2,600-square-foot facility, the mood is surprisingly peaceful. There are no dog fights, no aggressive barking, no growls.

In one corner is Becky, a charcoal-colored poodle whose back legs were paralyzed after a disc injury. She lifts her head up happily when approached for a pat.

In the middle of the room, a Newfoundland the size of a lion slumbers quietly on a magnetic bed designed to ease arthritis.

And then there's Sammi. Weinstein stops in with him every now and then just to visit. To say thanks.

"The best part about this whole story is him," Weinstein said. "Sammi, himself, wasn't going to accept not running to the front door or sniffing all the sniffs. I was just following his lead."

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