Best friends
THE PET MAGAZINE OF THE ONTARIO VETERINARY COLLEGE

An Investment in the Future of Veterinary Medicine

OVC HEALTH SCIENCES CENTRE OPENS NEW SURGERY AND ANESTHESIA FACILITIES, MADE POSSIBLE BY OVC PET TRUST’S FRIENDS TOGETHER FOR LONGER CAMPAIGN.

Improve Life.
2021 marks the 35th anniversary of OVC Pet Trust. From the very beginning, OVC Pet Trust has supported innovations in all aspects of pet health to help pets everywhere live longer, healthier lives. In the same way that improving the lives of animals is a central tenet of everything we do at the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC), the human-animal bond has always been at the heart of OVC Pet Trust. We honour the relationship between pets, their humans and veterinary caregivers through supporting healthcare, research and education that ultimately improve the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases of pets.

OVC Pet Trust was founded in 1986 by a group of dedicated volunteers to support the work of veterinary specialists and researchers at the Ontario Veterinary College who were committed to advancing the health and well-being of our animals – the companions and family members who give us comfort, joy and unconditional love.

Over the past 35 years, and now with more than $73.5 million raised, OVC Pet Trust has been fortunate to establish long-standing partnerships and friendships that have fuelled our shared mission of working to improve life for our beloved pets in many areas of health and disease. With your support, OVC Pet Trust invests more than $500,000 each year into research projects and equipment in many different disciplines of veterinary medicine, including: cancer, cardiology, diagnostic imaging, emergency and critical care, infectious disease, internal medicine, neurology, nutrition, ophthalmology, pain management and anesthesia, surgery, the human-animal bond and much more.

Together with our supporters, we have made many advances in pet health. As you’ll read in this issue of Best Friends, I was proud to mark the opening of new surgery and anesthesia facilities within the OVC Health Sciences Centre this past May. The transformation of these critical clinical spaces within our teaching hospital was made possible by OVC Pet Trust donors and represents an important milestone on our journey to upgrade aging infrastructure in our hospital and teaching environments. This is just one of the many accomplishments and goals we’ve reached over the past 35 years, but our work is far from complete. We hope you’ll stay in touch and connect with us as we look to the future and many more years of supporting vital projects that will impact animal health for the better.

Thank you to our entire OVC Pet Trust community for your dedication, your passion and your commitment to making the world a better place for people and their pets over the past 35 years. The Ontario Veterinary College is extremely fortunate to benefit from your generosity.

Dr. Jeff Wichtel
Dean and Professor
Ontario Veterinary College
University of Guelph

ABOUT OVC PET TRUST

OVC Pet Trust, founded in 1986 at the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC), University of Guelph, is Canada’s first charitable fund dedicated to the health and well-being of companion animals. OVC is a leader in veterinary healthcare, learning and discovery for the health of all species, including our own. In 2021, Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked OVC 1st in Canada, 3rd in North America and 5th in the world for veterinary science amongst veterinary schools worldwide.

TO LEARN MORE OR TO DONATE VISIT WWW.PETTRUST.CA

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FROM THE DESK OF OUR DIRECTOR

I’m thrilled to share the wonderful news that OVC’s new surgery and anesthesia facilities officially opened in May 2021. These upgrades were made possible by OVC Pet Trust supporters who helped us surpass our $9-million Friends Together for Longer campaign. The extensive redesign and transformation of our clinical facilities at the OVC Companion Animal Hospital will allow us to remain at the forefront of veterinary health care, education and discovery for many years to come.

The new areas provide a modern, state-of-the-art environment for our veterinary teams to care for our companion animal patients. Undoubtedly, they will also have a lasting impact on the learning and development of the future generation of veterinary professionals who are educated here, and who will then go on to treat thousands of pets in communities across Canada and even around the world. Most of all, the new facilities bring hope for pet owners, whose beloved companions need advanced, life-saving care. We could not be more grateful to our incredible donors who partnered with us to complete this major endeavour. Thank you. Read more about our new surgery and anesthesia facilities in a special feature story on page 16.

As always, OVC Pet Trust continues to invest in projects that are advancing animal health. From investigating new treatment therapies for cancer patients to identifying new treatment innovations for canine hemangiosarcoma, to exploring fluorescent imaging of the liver in dogs undergoing canine surgery, to improving chronic kidney disease in cats, our experts are at the forefront of veterinary medicine in modern and technologically-advanced facilities.

OVC Pet Trust invests in learning and education for the brightest minds and the future generation of global experts in the veterinary profession. Funding supports a variety of specialized training positions for licensed veterinarians who are pursuing advanced education to become board certified veterinary specialists. Funds raised also help to train the next generation of veterinary professionals in the OVC Health Sciences Centre. Each year, OVC graduates from the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) program go out into the world and work in communities across Ontario, Canada and around the globe.

RESEARCH: WE INNOVATE TO IMPROVE LIFE

Our innovative discoveries improve life for animals. Scientists and researchers at OVC are on the forefront of veterinary medicine and their respective fields of expertise. OVC Pet Trust funds ground-breaking research and discovery to improve the health of dogs, cats and other companion animals. Some of the projects our experts are investigating not only have implications for companion animals but may also have translational benefits for human health too.

Kim Robinson
Director, OVC Pet Trust
Canadian Veterinary College
University of Guelph
Cannabis use is rising in popularity thanks to more relaxed public policy in regions across North America. But where there’s “weed,” there’s a way – for dogs to become accidentally poisoned.

A new first-of-its-kind research study from the University of Guelph states that between 2009 and 2014, in locations across the U.S. where cannabis legislation became more lenient, there was an increase in cannabis poisoning cases among dogs. It is possible that the situation is similar in Canada, where cannabis products have been legalized and more widely available since October 2018.

“It’s statistically significant that as penalties for use and possession of cannabis were reduced in various regions, there was also an increase in cannabis poisoning calls in dogs,” says Mohammad Howard-Azzeh, a PhD candidate who is the study’s lead author.

HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

Cannabis products containing THC – the psychoactive ingredient that produces the “high” effect in humans – can be toxic to dogs. Knowing how much THC an animal has been exposed to after accidental ingestion can be difficult for veterinarians to determine from owner reports.

“When a dog consumes products with THC, it can lead to a variety of problems including a rapid heart rate, vomiting and even seizures,” says Dr. David Pearl, a veterinarian and professor in the Ontario Veterinary College’s (OVC) Department of Population Medicine. “The symptoms depend on factors such as the dose and size of the dog, and the effects can be quite distressing for the dog and the owner.”

Pearl says that unlike other types of drugs such as opioids, there is no reversal agent for a dog that has consumed cannabis. Veterinary clinics can provide supportive care, based on clinical presentation of the patient with cannabis toxicity.

SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS

Howard-Azzeh and Pearl worked with data from AnTox, a veterinary database that stores comprehensive clinical animal toxicology data related to calls to the Animal Poison Control Centre (APCC) of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. They categorized data into three levels: from states that had legal cannabis access, states where access was restricted except for medical use, and states where access was fully restricted.

The study also looked at socioeconomic factors, and factors relating to the dogs at the time. Accidental poisoning was more common in counties with high income variability and in urban, rather than rural, areas. Calls about accidental cannabis poisoning more commonly related to smaller, male and intact (not neutered or spayed) dogs.

“The data shows that the risk of cannabinoid poisoning occurring in a dog depends somewhat on its environment,” says Howard-Azzeh. “It also shows that policies that seem to relate only to humans can have a broader impact, and there is a need to bring more awareness to the issue.”

This research was funded by an NSERC Discovery Grant awarded to Dr. David Pearl.
Am I a cat whisperer?

COULD YOU IDENTIFY A CAT’S MOOD THROUGH ITS FACIAL EXPRESSIONS?

If you’ve ever tried to interpret how your pet cat is feeling, you’re not alone. This mystery of feline mood is what motivated University of Guelph researcher Dr. Georgia Mason to investigate whether people can accurately identify how cats are feeling based on their facial expressions, a topic that has attracted very little research in the scientific community until recently. After years of studying, she’s been able to interpret three cat’s facial cues.

Mason wanted to scientifically put others’ ability to decode cat expressions to the test. While research has shown many animals, like mice, rats, pigs, horses and rabbits have strikingly similar facial expressions when they are in pain, minimal investigation has been done on the topic of pet cats, a creature with a well-known reputation of being mysterious and difficult to decipher. Mason collaborated with OVC professor Lee Niel, and predoctoral researchers Lauren Dawson and Jenna Cleal, to develop an online survey where more than 11,000 participants watched short video clips of close-up cat faces as they experienced various positive and negative situations.

The researchers hope that one day we will be able to identify specific signs and facial cues to better understand a cat’s feelings. The study revealed most participants were not successful at judging whether a facial expression was “positive” or “negative.” However, participants were more likely to do well on the survey if they were a woman, a young millennial or a veterinary professional. Of the hundreds of participants, 13 per cent achieved an “excellent” score by correctly identifying between 20 and 50 of the 20 videos they viewed.

“Interestingly, being a cat owner or cat lover (93 per cent of people who did the survey had lived with a cat as an adult) did not help participants better read cats’ facial expressions,” Mason explains. “Our study revealed that professional veterinary experience, not personal experience or feelings, was a key to success and in general, people were better at reading cats in a positive situation compared to a negative one,” she adds.

The study may open the door to explore exactly how cats’ faces reveal their emotional states and allow for the development of tools that would help more people become better at understanding them.

“Cats are sending us subtle signals that a lot of us likely miss, and having the skills to accurately interpret how they’re feeling might mean we’re also able to better meet their needs and preferences both at home and during veterinary care,” says Niel, adding that we know from previous research that cats are taken to the veterinarian less often than dogs and are handled differently during exams.

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The room (OR) is a magical place. There’s an excitement about it that’s captivating and inspiring for a visitor experiencing it for the first time. It’s messy, yet sterile. Tranquil, yet nerve-wracking. Serene, yet intimidating. Bright lights and beeping monitors take over the room. One can appreciate the complexity – and beauty – of the fine balance between life and death here. At the same time there’s an overpowering sense of security and comfort that fills the space. This is where the fixers, the menders, the healers and the helpers work.

Dr. Brigitte Brisson is one of the fixers and there’s a softness, a powerful energy, a purposeful precision that’s unparalleled in her operating room. Brisson is a board-certified small animal surgeon and has worked in clinical practice for more than 25 years. She is a small animal surgeon and has worked in clinical practice for more than 25 years. She is a small animal surgeon and has worked in clinical practice for more than 25 years.

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MORNING - DAY ONE

Clinic duties are divided by appointment days and surgery days. Today will be dedicated to surgery. Brisson is joined on clinics this week by two residents: Drs. Samantha Stine and Philippe Larose. Two rotating interns are also on the service this week: Drs. Adam Quinlan and Isabela Del Carpio, both recent veterinary school graduates. For many weeks of the academic year, the team is joined by 6 to 8 fourth year DVM students on academic rotation – but there are no students on rotation this week. Four surgeries in dog patients have been scheduled for the hours ahead: an intrahepatic shunt (an abnormal vessel in the liver that bypasses blood from the intestines), a ventral slot (a common surgical technique to relieve disc herniation in the spine), a bilateral sialodacryoadenectomy (to remove damaged salivary glands / ducts) and a wound closure in a patient with an antibiotic-resistant infection.

Four surgeons in dog patients have been scheduled for the hours ahead: an intrahepatic shunt (an abnormal vessel in the liver that bypasses blood from the intestines), a ventral slot (a common surgical technique to relieve disc herniation in the spine), a bilateral sialodacryoadenectomy (to remove damaged salivary glands / ducts) and a wound closure in a patient with an antibiotic-resistant infection.

Mille, a four-year-old Labrador Retriever is induced by the anesthesiology team and surgically prepared for Dr. Brisson and her team. The interventional procedure will involve fluoroscopy, a medical imaging technique that uses real-time X-ray technology to visualize the inside of the body. “Everyone’s wearing lead?” Brisson asks. Wearing lead personal protective equipment (PPE) reduces exposure to ionizing radiation during the procedure.

After an hour in the OR, it becomes clear that the previously placed stent and coils prevent the passage of the catheter for safe delivery of additional coils. The only option would be an approach through the spleen, something the team would need to discuss with Miller’s parents. “Thanks everybody – let’s close,” Brisson says. She provides guidance on Miller’s recovery in the OVC Intensive Care Unit (ICU), advising the team to ensure pressure is applied on the incision along Miller’s neck while the tube that has helped her breathe during surgery is removed.

Then, after a quick review of a scan of another patient in the duty, Archie is prepped, Brisson takes a five-minute break for a late lunch and then scrubs into surgery. Like a dance, the ebb and flow of the day is well underway. Archie is still in surgery with Peanut as Stine wakes up in anesthesia recovery and is moved to the ICU, and a Golden Retriever named Russell is prepared by the anesthesia team for surgery with Stine.

Brisson shares research with the team as she works, quizzing and teaching in each procedure as the day unfolds. “What do you think? What do you see? How do we best proceed?”

Next up is Archie, whose bilateral sialoceles surgery was delayed by the day’s emergencies. This condition occurs when a collection of saliva leaks from a damaged salivary gland or duct and accumulates in the tissues that become inflamed. While Archie is prepped, Brisson takes a five-minute break for a late lunch and then scrubs into surgery. Like a dance, the ebb and flow of the day is well underway. Archie is still in surgery with Stine as Lucy wakes up in anesthesia recovery and is moved to the ICU, and a Golden Retriever named Russell is prepared by the anesthesia team for surgery with Stine.

It’s clear surgeons are used to running on adrenaline. Endurance, tenacity and passion are key to thrive in this profession.

AFTERNOON - DAY ONE

The surgical aseptic technique is a collection of practices that help protect patient incisions from contamination. The sterile field in the OR is a sacred space – it is the area in the OR that is free from disease-causing bacteria or microorganisms. All supplies, equipment and instruments in the surgical field are pristine, meticulously cleaned and sterilized. It’s of utmost importance to maintain the sterile field throughout any procedure and this is strictly enforced in each and every OR.

Brisson’s next case is a dog named Peanut who will undergo a ventral slot surgery for a hemiated disc in his neck. In another OR, Dr. Stine is operating on a dog named Lucy. As the team works, there is a continuous shifting in the schedule to effectively triage the urgent cases that have arrived today. This involves a high level of coordination across the entire OVC HSC. Like a domino effect, changes in the surgical team’s caseload mean changes for the Anesthesia Service, the Intensive Care Unit and the Diagnostic Imaging Service – and potentially other specialty areas too. Specialists are consulted to determine what order the next two surgeries will be in and how best to coordinate sedation and administration of anesthetic drugs to maximize patient comfort.

After an hour in the OR with Peanut, the surgery is a success and without missing a beat, Brisson heads right into Stine’s spinal surgery with Lucy.

Brisson shares research with the team as she works, quizzing and teaching in each procedure as the day unfolds. “What do you think? What do you see? How do we best proceed?”

EVENING - DAY ONE

Time seems to stand still in the OR. As a surgeon, you can’t be afraid to (literally and figuratively) get your hands dirty.

As the evening is underway, Archie is in the home stretch of his surgery, and the team notes that it ended up being a bit more involved than they’d initially anticipated. This is a common situation in surgery. Surgeons rely on diagnostic imaging to prepare and plan their best course of action – but sometimes once they’re inside, they must adapt and change strategies quickly. The team flushes Archie’s wound with sterile saline and inserts a drain as the surgery wraps up.
The rest of the evening is jam-packed: telephone calls to update owners are made, checks and physical exams are underway in the ICU on admitted and recuperating patients; there is case review, paperwork and preparation for the next day. Patients who are recovering from surgery typically stay in the ICU for approximately 24 hours and are monitored 24/7 by the Emergency and Critical Care team.

Brisson stops to speak with Larose, one of her residents, about the research component of his residency and an upcoming surgery the following week that will be part of this study: an OVC Pet Trust-support ed project that is investigating how to improve patient outcomes and surgeon visualization in dogs who undergo laparoscopic gall bladder removal surgery with the use of fluorescent imaging of the liver. It is a novel imaging procedure in human and veterinary medicine and this is the first of its kind in dogs.

**MORNING - DAY TWO**

The clinical training required to become a veterinary surgeon is rigorous and learning occurs everywhere on the clinic floor of OVC’s teaching hospital.

Early mornings involve rounds, case discussion and teaching. The team follows up on their hospitalized patients – Millie, Peanut, Lucy, Archie and Russell – who underwent surgery the day before. Morning follow-up calls with owners are made and discharge plans are underway. By mid-morning, Cashew, the cat, a patient with an obstructed ureter (a blockage in the tube that carries urine from the kidney to the bladder), is undergoing a subcutaneous urinary bypass (SUB) which will restore the flow of urine from the kidney to the bladder through a man-made tube, and provide immense relief for Cashew, who has been developing renal failure. Shortly before lunch, Cashew’s surgery is wrapping up; Brisson says it was the outcome she’d hoped for. She takes off her lead equipment and recovery plan with Brisson. At the same time, the triage technician consults with Brisson about two other emergency cases as the afternoon flies by.

**AFTERNOON - DAY TWO**

Like a well-oiled machine, the surgery support team work in the background. They continuously stock inventory, track patient billing, perform cleaning and sterilization, and flip ORs so they are ready for the next procedure.

Chest radiographs, also known as X-rays, have been ordered for Tupac – if his cancer has spread to his lungs, surgery will not move forward. ICU clinician Dr. Xiao Ting Yiew pops in to discuss Cashew’s care and recovery plan with Brisson. At the same time, the triage technician inquires about Buddy, an oncology patient at the cancer centre with a mass on his spleen and in need of surgery as soon as possible.

**EVENING - DAY TWO**

Brisson calls Tupac’s owner to share the good news and guides intern Dr. Quinlan on Miller’s discharge paperwork. Buddy, who has had his spleen removed, is waking up and is transferred to the ICU. Dr. Larose checks on Rex and Goose, two of his patients recovering from surgery earlier in the week. Rounds are underway. It’s looking like it’ll be a late night tonight – Brisson plans to make a quick trip home to see her family and then head back to the hospital in the late evening for an emergency referral – a very long day, with surgery expected into the early morning hours. It’s all in a day’s work for her and her team.

Even in the brief moments of respite, while expertly navigating the challenges of a typical day in clinics, Brisson enthusiastically champions the importance of teaching, mentorship and inspiring future medical professionals and veterinary leaders. “It’s incredibly rewarding to see our students, interns and residents grow and progress through their surgery training,” says Brisson. “The variety of cases and the challenges each day brings is why I love being a surgeon. It is truly a privilege to work with my OVC colleagues who all share a common goal of solving problems and helping pets and their families.”

Adjustments are made to the schedule and the team adapts. Brisson spends 27 weeks of the year on clinics – it’s just one of the ways she fulfills her teaching duties as a professor in the Department of Clinical Studies at OVC. She also lectures and instructs labs for student veterinarians in addition to her research and service responsibilities. As a young adult, Brisson considered veterinary medicine and pediatric neurosurgery as potential career paths. It was her love for animals, the variety of conditions and species and the diversity of diseases, that ultimately drew her to veterinary medicine.

The Diagnostic Imaging team, who also reviewed the previously performed CT scan, confirms that Tupac’s cancer has not spread, and surgery is set to proceed. Tupac has one of the biggest sternal tumours Brisson has ever attempted to remove in a cat. Her goal is to excise the entire tumour along with a portion of the sternum and several ribs. A curative approach is the goal but it is not always possible depending on the individual case. Given the size of the tumour and its location, clean margins are unlikely to be achieved for Tupac but his owners want to give him a chance.

“We’ve got you,” Brisson whispers to Tupac, as she dons her gown and gloves up. After an almost two-hour surgery, Brisson and her team successfully resect the entire tumour and save most areas in the surrounding tissue in the process, allowing for complete closure of the large defect along the chest and abdomen.

Triage consults with Brisson about two other emergency cases as the afternoon flies by.

**PATIENT LUCY**

Lucy recovers from spinal surgery. Photo credit: Ashleigh Martyn.

**PATIENT TUPAC**

Tupac – if his cancer has spread to his lungs, surgery will not move forward. ICU clinician Dr. Xiao Ting Yiew pops in to discuss Cashew’s care and recovery plan with Brisson. At the same time, the triage technician inquires about Buddy, an oncology patient at the cancer centre with a mass on his spleen and in need of surgery as soon as possible.

Even in the brief moments of respite, while expertly navigating the challenges of a typical day in clinics, Brisson enthusiastically champions the importance of teaching, mentorship and inspiring future medical professionals and veterinary leaders. “It’s incredibly rewarding to see our students, interns and residents grow and progress through their surgery training,” says Brisson. “The variety of cases and the challenges each day brings is why I love being a surgeon. It is truly a privilege to work with my OVC colleagues who all share a common goal of solving problems and helping pets and their families.”

Adjustments are made to the schedule and the team adapts. Brisson spends 27 weeks of the year on clinics – it’s just one of the ways she fulfills her teaching duties as a professor in the Department of Clinical Studies at OVC. She also lectures and instructs labs for student veterinarians in addition to her research and service responsibilities. As a young adult, Brisson considered veterinary medicine and pediatric neurosurgery as potential career paths. It was her love for animals, the variety of conditions and species and the diversity of diseases, that ultimately drew her to veterinary medicine.

The Diagnostic Imaging team, who also reviewed the previously performed CT scan, confirms that Tupac’s cancer has not spread, and surgery is set to proceed. Tupac has one of the biggest sternal tumours Brisson has ever attempted to remove in a cat. Her goal is to excise the entire tumour along with a portion of the sternum and several ribs. A curative approach is the goal but it is not always possible depending on the individual case. Given the size of the tumour and its location, clean margins are unlikely to be achieved for Tupac but his owners want to give him a chance.

“We’ve got you,” Brisson whispers to Tupac, as she dons her gown and gloves up. After an almost two-hour surgery, Brisson and her team successfully resect the entire tumour and save most areas in the surrounding tissue in the process, allowing for complete closure of the large defect along the chest and abdomen.

Triage consults with Brisson about two other emergency cases as the afternoon flies by.
The human-animal bond is critical to the health of many individuals, families and communities. According to the Canadian Animal Health Institute, it is estimated that more than half of Canadians share their life with a pet.

Each year, countless people cannot afford to pay for basic veterinary care. This financial barrier can lead to poor health outcomes for pets and the people who care for them. Historically, veterinary education has not focused on addressing this social inequity. The Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) and many community-based veterinarians are addressing these and other social justice issues with a goal of creating compelling, sustainable and equitable ways to improve access to care, including providing subsidies for treatment for pets of qualified clients.

In 2018, long-time OVC supporters Kim and Stu Lang kick-started Remy’s Fund with a $1 million endowment donation. A program of OVC Pet Trust, the fund is named in memory of the Lang’s beloved dog Remy, a yellow Labrador Retriever they rescued. Two years later, the care Remy received at OVC saved her life. Remy’s Fund is part of a larger $11 million endowment donation Kim and Stu Lang made to create the $11 million endowment donation.

Since the CHPP was announced in 2019, OVC leaders have created a new model called incremental care, which involves critically assessing the patient and prioritizing diagnostics and treatments that match the client’s resources or budget. Bateman expects that within three years, once the CHPP curriculum changes – which will include new clinical rotations and increased experiential learning opportunities – are implemented at OVC, Remy’s Fund will not only support families needing extra medical care, but will be critical in helping students to understand incremental care.

Remy’s Fund will do a lot of good work in these communities, and practical learning at this level is profoundly engaging and formative for students,” says Bateman.

INSPIRE + CATALYZE POSITIVE CHANGE

In addition to Indigenous communities, Remy’s Fund will play an important role in supporting pets of families and individuals experiencing poverty or trauma. “For a person who has experienced trauma or violence by other humans, pets can be an important, loving, unconditional relationship in their life,” says Bateman.

“Pets are critical to a person’s welfare and mental health, especially when other areas of their life are unstable.”

Bateman is deeply grateful to Kim and Stu Lang for their vision to create CHP.

“This program will allow OVC to be a leader in understanding how best to demonstrate the impact that providing veterinary care and improving animal health can ultimately have on human health and the health of the community,” he says. “Most important, CHP will inspire and catalyze positive change in the veterinary profession, arming the next generation of veterinarians with confidence, cultural competence and leadership skills to serve their communities and ultimately make the world a better place.”

To give to Remy’s Fund visit pettrust.ca/donate.
HOW WE IMPROVE LIFE: LONGER, HEALTHIER LIVES FOR PETS

The halls of the Ontario Veterinary College's (OVC) Companion Animal Hospital look a bit different these days. With the recent completion of a long-awaited capital improvement project within the hospital's surgery and anesthesia facilities, members of the clinical team move seamlessly through their tasks. The team delivers the world-class care and advanced treatment options OVC is known for — now in a brighter, more spacious environment that has been thoughtfully designed to prioritize patient comfort and recovery. Made possible with the support of OVC Pet Trust's Friends Together for Longer campaign, which launched in 2015 and surpassed its $9-million goal, these new facilities will allow OVC to remain at the forefront of veterinary care, education, training, research and innovation. Most importantly, they will allow patients to experience less pain, recover more quickly and return home faster to their families where they belong.

The new facilities, which opened in May 2021, are starting to feel lived-in. Teams bustle about in their respective areas with the constant, low thrum of medical equipment and monitors serving as a reassuring soundtrack to their daily tasks. The work is demanding and the days are long; but there’s a feeling of freshness; a newness that’s invigorating. The updated space is physically impressive and remarkable in scale, but one still sees, hears and feels a familiar, soothing energy as the hospital’s dedicated team delivers exceptional care to each and every patient that comes through its doors. A comforting embrace; a calm reassurance; a compassionate word of encouragement — these are the hallmarks of OVC’s model of care as its team treats the most complex of cases and sickest of patients.

As one can imagine, the challenges of executing intricate construction projects within an operational and fully functioning tertiary care hospital are complex,” says Dr. Stephanie Nykamp, Associate Dean, Clinical Program and renovation project manager. “The new facilities provide a more comfortable and functional setting for staff, as well as an efficient and modern environment with the latest tools and technology for our veterinary teams to practice, train and care for companion animals at OVC.”

A LASTING GLOBAL IMPACT

OVC Dean Dr. Jeff Wichtel says investing in infrastructure upgrades are critical to advance the organization’s strategic priorities and are vital to maintaining its status as an accredited veterinary college now and into the future. This modernization will ensure OVC remains at the forefront of veterinary education and practice in the delivery of its Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) program and specialized graduate student training programs, and through advances in scientific discovery and care. In 2021, OVC ranked first in Canada and fifth in the world for veterinary science in a global ranking of veterinary schools.

“OVC has long been a leader in veterinary discovery that pushes the boundaries of innovation in pet care to improve the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases in companion animals,” says Wichtel. “These new facilities will have a lasting impact on the training and development of the future generation of veterinary professionals who will go on to treat thousands of pets in communities across Canada and around the world,” he adds.
MEET SOME OF THE FIRST PATIENTS TREATED IN THE NEW OVC FACILITIES

AN INVESTMENT IN THE MEDICINE OF TOMORROW

The new medical spaces have been a long time coming.

Where the old surgery facilities had just three surgical suites, the new James Slaight Advanced Surgical Complex now holds eight. The complex is also home to the Linda Barrow Minimally Invasive Procedures (MIP) Suite, a first of its kind at a veterinary teaching hospital.

The big project, which had just three surgical suites, was a long time coming.

Procedures (MIP) Suite, a first of its kind at a veterinary teaching hospital. The complex is also home to the Linda Barrow Minimally Invasive Procedures (MIP) Suite, a first of its kind at a veterinary teaching hospital.

The OR has a dual purpose — whether they are physically treated at OVC or by one of our graduates who has been educated in this new facility — live longer, healthier lives,” she says.

MODERNIZATION FOR EFFICIENCY AND INNOVATION

Comfort reigns supreme in the Kim and Rui Lang Anesthesia and Pain Management Unit and the John and Jean Waller Anesthesia Recovery Room.

Much like a central subway station during rush hour, the Anesthesia and Pain Management Service is a main hub at the OVC Health Sciences Centre. Patients from many clinical services pass through this unit, accompanied by a member of the anesthesia team. They are prepared, induced and walked up from anesthesia and sedation in these spaces. The care team constantly monitors physiological parameters — including breathing, heart rate, blood pressure and body temperature — before, during and after the patient’s procedure.

The standard of care is not that different between animals at OVC and humans. Human health-grade monitors and equipment line the new spaces; the team performs epidurals, places catheters and measures advanced parameters in patients.

“We have a lot of patients that are very sick. In critical and complex cases, that can be very challenging,” says veterinary anesthesiologist Dr. Melissa Sinclair as she rests a caring hand on Fenway, a 13-year-old Golden Retriever, as her team prepares the dog for surgery in the anesthesia prep room.

Sinclair reviews Fenway’s anesthetic protocols with her team. She goes on to explain that animals, like people, undergo anesthesia for surgery. The team works to minimize pain, discomfort and stress for each individual patient. It is also used for diagnostic imaging procedures to keep the patient still, pain-free and relaxed in order to properly assess their medical condition.

Sinclair says the OR shouldn’t accomplish the research she’s pursued throughout her career without the support of OVC Pet Trust. She’s constantly looking for ways to enhance patient safety and minimize the undesirable effects of drugs in her sick patients (anesthetic medications can have side effects.

FENWAY

Fenway, a 13-year-old Golden Retriever, experienced an episode of collapse in early May this year. Tests revealed pericardial effusion, the buildup of extra fluid in the space around the heart. Another scan revealed masses on Fenway’s spleen, a nodule on the adrenal gland and a mass on the liver. After being referred to the OVC Oncology Service for evaluation and to discuss options for his care, he was referred to the Surgery team for further staging and surgical intervention.

Fenway was admitted to the hospital in June and underwent general anesthesia for more diagnostic imaging tests. After diagnosis, Fenway returned to OVC for a laparoscopic-assisted splenectomy, the surgical removal of the spleen, and liver biopsies in the new Minimally Invasive Procedures Suite. The OVC team performed a video-assisted, minimally invasive surgery to evaluate the mass on Fenway’s heart along with a pericardectomy, which involved the surgical removal of the sac around the heart. Fenway did well in surgery and recovered smoothly from anesthesia.

Soon, he will go back home with his family in Waterloo. Biopsies taken during surgery confirmed Fenway’s diagnosis of hemangiosarcoma, a type of canine cancer that targets blood vessels. Fenway’s owners, Dean Cox and Kimberly Dubbignon, say he’s grateful for the hope he’s experienced through OVC.

“Fenway’s battling a devastatingly serious disease, but I know he’s receiving the best care and maintaining the greatest quality of life through the expertise of his care team at the OVC.”

Kim and Stu Lang Anesthesia and Pain Management Unit and the John and Jean Waller Anesthesia Recovery Room.

Photo credit: Scott McQuarrie, scottmcquarrie.com.

Photo credit: Scott McQuarrie, scottmcquarrie.com.
SONA VOYD

on the heart and the lungs). Sinclair views the new facilities as a true transformation in improving patient comfort and recovery. As medicine continues to evolve and the service is busier than ever, the new spaces allow Sinclair and her team to meet the needs of their patients without being held back by older hospital infrastructure. The new anesthesiology spaces are larger and brighter, with a quiet and dedicated area for patients to recover and wake up from anesthesia, separate from the noisier induction area – a distinct improvement for patient comfort and recovery in dogs, cats and other companion animals.

Ponwasy is wheeled on a gurney into the new surgical complex by a Registered Veterinary Technician (RVT), entering the new MIP suite as small animal surgeon Dr. Amant Singh briefs his team on the surgical plan and the outcomes he hopes to achieve.

Surgical oncologist Dr. Michelle Oblak reflects on her last surgery in the old facilities as bittersweet and remembers the OR where she grew from an undergraduate student to a veterinarian, to a senior resident, to faculty: but she has immense gratitude for the doctors who made the new facilities a reality. She adds that the old facilities, built in the 1950s, had become crowded and dated and the increased surgical caseload OVC has experienced over the past five to 10 years. While she and her colleagues never let an older environment compromise the level of care they were able to provide or hold them back from innovating and pushing the boundaries, she enjoys working in a more modern working environment. “OVC Pet Trust is the lifeline for the work we do here at OVC,” Oblak says. “Support from OVC Pet Trust positions us to be a centre of veterinary excellence in the world, I’m proud of that.”

OPTIMIZATION OF CLINICAL SPACES

The specialty of internal medicine often involves the use of non-surgical techniques to diagnose and treat acute and chronic disorders or illnesses that may involve multiple organ systems. One of the specialized and complex diagnostic techniques the OVC Medicine Service commonly performs is endoscopy, a minimally invasive procedure used to explore and visualize the inside of the body. Endoscopy was historically performed at OVC in a small room within the old anesthesia unit. Upgrades have created the new Stone Endoscopy Unit. This new unit was named in honour of former OVC Dean and surgeon Dr. Elizabeth Stone, and it includes two massive rooms dedicated to endoscopic procedures and equipment.

Endoscopy allows internists to identify issues, and sometimes that involves consulting with other services on the nature of a specific illness or condition in their patient. Internal medicine team members are problem solvers and detectives, conducting detailed investigations to diagnose and help their patients. The complexity of arriving at a treatment plan involves differential diagnoses, a nuanced task aimed at distinguishing one particular disease or condition from others that present similar clinical signs that is an important part of clinical reasoning and decision-making in the health care profession.

Scopings performed in the new facilities help dogs, cats and avian and exotic patients who may suffer from conditions such as gastrointestinal (GI) diseases, pancreatitis and liver diseases, kidney and urinary tract diseases, foreign body ingestion and more.

TAKE A LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES

Hundreds of types of routine and advanced procedures occur in OVC’s new facilities. Patients are referred by their family veterinarian, to the Surgery and Internal Medicine Services. Surgeries from a number of other specialty services are performed here by ophthalmology, neurology, cardiology and avian and exotics specialists.

The space, like a human hospital, is a multi-faceted facility where integrated care is delivered on a daily basis. It is also home to a team of interprofessional veterinary health care workers who provide patient care, including clinicians and board certified specialists, technicians, nurses and support staff, residents, interns, trainees and students.

IT’S ALL ABOUT THE HUMAN-ANIMAL BOND

OVC Pet Trust Director Kim Robinson is grateful for the generosity and support of the many individuals who helped turn an early vision into a reality, and for the difference the new spaces will make in the lives of thousands of pets and their people. A dog owner and animal advocate, Robinson is proud to advance pet health and well-being through OVC Pet Trust’s core mission of helping to improve life for pets and supporting the bond between people and animals. “The improvements to the OVC Companion Animal Hospital ensure pets can receive life-saving procedures with fewer complications and faster recovery times, allowing people and their pets to be together for longer.”

MIRA

Mira, a six-year-old Mastiff mixed breed dog, is a neurology patient who was referred to the OVC Emergency Service in late June after experiencing seizures. A series of tests were performed, including an MRI and a cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) analysis and Mira was diagnosed with a type of brain cancer called a glioma, the second most common brain tumour in dogs. She is visiting OVC for a CT scan for radiation therapy planning.

These types of tumours do not respond to chemotherapy; radiation is the best therapeutic option, which her owner, Allison Do Rego, has decided to pursue to treat Mira’s cancer. Many patients like Mira are anesthetized for diagnostic imaging and tests, to ensure comfort and to keep them still and relaxed during the procedure. “Mira is my whole world,” Allison says. I know she is in the best hands at OVC.”

Photo credit: Scott McQuarrie, scottmcquarrie.com.

Meet some of the first patients treated in the new OVC facilities.
Crouton

Crouton, a one-year-old domestic medium hair cat, presented to the OVC Internal Medicine and Surgery Service for a spay and a cystoscopy, a procedure to check the health of the urethra and bladder. Crouton was anesthetized for her procedures. She was referred to OVC after her foster owner noticed the cat suffered from urinary incontinence and recurrent urinary tract infections. Crouton’s human Stephanie Pisani says she expects Crouton’s family to work with OVC to help her recover. After her procedures, Crouton will have follow-up appointments to address ongoing concerns but is hopeful OVC will be able to help. After her procedures, Crouton will go back to her foster home with Stephanie and her bonded cat sister, Pretzel.

Why did you pursue a career in veterinary medicine?

From an early age, I felt a strong bond to animals of all kinds. Throughout my life I have experienced the joys of pet ownership. I grew up with two long-haired Dachshunds as well as a cat. They were happy, loving animals, always looking for their next adventure. From a medical aspect, my mother was a cardiac unit nurse at a hospital in Toronto and I always admired her work ethic and enjoyed hearing about her day. I knew from an early age that I wanted to find a way to combine my interest in medicine and my love for animals. To this end, I attended the University of Guelph for my undergraduate degree in Biomedical Sciences and the Ontario Veterinary College for my veterinary degree. As I progressed through veterinary school, my passion for animals grew. I developed relationships not only with the patients I was seeing daily, but also with the families of which they were a part. Through the treatment of these pets, I felt I was making a difference not only to the pet’s well-being, but also the family as a whole. To this day, I would have to say my favorite aspect of my job is the feeling I get when I receive thank you letters from the families of the pets I have helped.

Why did you pursue advanced training and specialize as a veterinary surgeon?

Throughout my undergraduate degree and my first year of veterinary school, I figure skated competitively. As an athlete, there are many injuries that can require surgical intervention and it is of utmost importance to be able to return to the sport quickly. It was through this lens that I became fascinated with minimally invasive surgery. While in my fourth year of veterinary school, I watched dogs who had torn their cranial cruciate ligament (the equivalent of an ACL in humans) limp into the clinic on three legs. When the owners came to pick them up two days later, the dogs were already beginning to put weight on their operated leg. As I continued to specialize in surgery during my four-year residency program, I became captivated by the idea of using a small camera through approximate five-millimetre incisions to evaluate the inside of a joint, as opposed to making a much larger incision as previously performed. This advanced surgical technique allows for a much faster and more comfortable recovery.

What is your current research focussed on?

During my residency at Texas A&M University, I completed a Master of Science in stem cell therapy and its application to repair damaged cartilage within joints. Now, as a veterinary surgeon, I have had the privilege of working with OVC’s Dr. Thomas Koch evaluating the use of stem cell therapy for chronic elbow osteoarthritis in dogs. Further to this research, I am interested in evaluating inflammation of the patellar tendon post cruciate (ACL) repair in dogs. Finally, I enjoy evaluating teaching techniques – including the use of models – and their effect on student education.

What do the new surgery facilities at OVC mean to you and what benefits do they provide?

I have the privilege of working in the new surgery facilities at the Ontario Veterinary College. This new surgical space allows multiple services to perform multiple surgeries at the same time and move from one surgery to the next more seamlessly. From an education standpoint, the larger rooms and monitors provide an exceptional teaching environment for the residents, interns and students.

Do you own any animals yourself?

I currently own a five-year-old male one-eyed Labrador Retriever named Bauer. I rescued him in Texas when he was surrendered after finding a tumour in his eye at only four weeks of age. We have since removed his eye and he is doing fantastic with no return of his tumour. He currently spends his time at my parents’ house with their yellow Labrador Retriever Hudson and their new puppy Kobi while I am on the clinic floor. I also have an approximately 14-year-old female domestic shorthaired cat named Moxy.
Pathology, the study of disease, is commonly referred to as the bridge between science and medicine. Pathologists play a critical role in research: they help to advance medicine by developing new treatments or ways to fight infections, viruses and diseases, such as cancer.

The world of cancer research is intricate. One veterinary specialist is working to unlock the key to the diagnosis and prediction of outcomes in cancers affecting pets.

Cancer researcher Dr. Geoffrey Wood is a specialist in veterinary pathology and co-director of the Institute for Comparative Cancer Investigation at the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC). In his current work, he is comparing the behaviour of cancer cells across various species to better understand how the disease can be effectively managed. His hope is that this research will benefit not only companion animals, but potentially all species, including humans. In addition to studying dogs and cats, Wood’s work also includes long-lived animals like horses, whales and elephants.

“Thousands of mutations exist when it comes to cancer,” Wood says. “When we look at the same disease in two different species, we can start to uncover commonalities to help direct efforts towards a better target for therapy — this is our ultimate goal.”

DOGS MAY HOLD THE KEY FOR UNLOCKING ANSWERS IN MANY SPECIES

Wood is investigating ways to use mutations in cancerous tumours to help predict patient outcomes. He says the answer may involve micro RNA, commonly abbreviated as miRNA, which are very small functional and versatile molecules that are made by cells. Hundreds of miRNA exist in the body, and their primary purpose is gene regulation. Wood explains that changes in one miRNA can have a big effect on cells and have striking similarities across species.

Wood’s lab is not just dedicated to studying one type of cancer. Rather, the work tackles multiple disease types across various species, and Wood is heavily investing time, funds and efforts into research he hopes will help pet owners make difficult decisions. He hopes to be able to unlock some long-awaited questions about how and why disease occurs and how we can predict outcomes in patients.

Wood is working toward the ability to diagnose and predict the outcome of canine cancer patients with a simple blood test. Whether it is bone cancer, blood cancer, hemangiosarcoma (cancer of the blood vessels) or another type of cancer, the same principles may apply when we are looking for answers and potential solutions, Wood says.

In January 2019, Wood and his collaborators published the first study to compare cancer genomes across human, canine and equine tumours in mucosal melanoma. The research team sequenced the genomes of mucosal melanoma tumours from 66 humans, 65 dogs and 28 horses; they discovered a handful of genes that were commonly mutated in all species. The study not only showed the commonalities in mutations across species in the same kind of tumour, but it showed differences too. Wood says his work opens the door to be able to do this on a larger scale, after all, it had never been done with three species before.

In a more recent study, Wood and his colleagues found something they didn’t expect in blood samples of dogs who had been diagnosed with an aggressive type of lymphoma: multiple miRNAs that may be of interest for detection and for the forecasting and prediction of lymphoma in dog patients. While the discovery of miRNAs as effective biological markers for human cancer is an active area of research, there are currently limited studies exploring miRNAs in canine cancer.

Wood’s work demonstrates the many advantages to the medical and research community of recognizing and using dogs as a model for understanding disease – specifically cancer.

“Spontaneous tumours in dogs are gaining recognition as models of human cancers for the development of therapies that can benefit both species,” Wood says. “Our research shows the importance of understanding the genetic similarities and differences of cancers across species so that the most biologically relevant drug targets are prioritized.”

Wood highlights that OVC Pet Trust provides unparalleled and valuable resources and tools for his team’s research endeavours, particularly having access to the Companion Animal Tumour Sample Bank (CATSBE), located within the OVC Health Sciences Centre and supported through The Smiling Blue Skies Cancer Fund.

“Diseases that occur in multiple species are very important to study,” Wood advocates. “The pathogenesis, or more simply put, how disease develops, particularly in cancer patients, may hold clues for the greater scientific and medical community at large.”
DOG HEALTH

Fluorescent imaging of the liver and biliary tree in dogs undergoing gallbladder removal
Dr. Brigitte Binson

Improved visualization of the anatomic structures of the biliary tree (the system of vessels that connects the liver, gallbladder and pancreas through a series of ducts) will be useful in all biliary procedures, whether open or laparoscopic, including liver surgeries for tumour resection and biliary trauma cases, which are particularly challenging. The information gained from this clinical study is the first of its kind and will be directly implemented for use in clinical care, setting the stage for the use of this technology in these and eventually other procedures.

Assessing diagnostic and treatment targets in canine lung tumors
Dr. Michelle Oblak

Current techniques for imaging and treating lung cancers in dogs are limited and invasive. This research will establish a connection between high levels of a specific tissue marker, Folate receptor alpha (FRA), and lung cancer in dogs. Once this connection is confirmed, a technique for liquid biopsy will be developed. Ultimately, this work will form the foundation for further studies in canine lung cancers and other cancer types focusing on minimally invasive diagnostic and treatment methods benefiting both pets and humans.

Evaluating new techniques for imaging pancreatic tumours in dogs using advanced technology to improve accuracy
Dr. Michelle Oblak

Insulinomas are a rare, aggressive type of pancreatic cancer in dogs. If we can better visualize the primary pancreatic mass and any areas where the cancer has spread (lymph nodes and/or other organs), these can be removed or biopsied during surgery which may improve patient survival and outcome. Using a specialized dye called XG, we can make the invisible visible through exposure of the dye to near infrared light (NIRF). The hope is that this dye will collect in pancreatic tumour cells, improving surgical visualization. This technique can be used for a number of applications in veterinary medicine, many that are currently under research. Once established, it is expected that the use of XG will become standard of care during surgical treatment of various cancers.

CAT HEALTH

Establishment of reference intervals for urine KIM (Kidney Injury Molecule)-1 in healthy cats to improve outcomes in patients with chronic kidney disease
Dr. Alice DelFarges

This research aims to drastically improve outcomes for cats and perhaps lead to decreased prevalence of chronic kidney disease (CKD) in the older feline population. Having a validated, easy to use test with reference intervals could change the clinician’s ability to diagnose kidney injury and revolutionize the prevention of CKD.

Evaluating the use of 3-D non-invasive bedside bladder ultrasound images in cats
Dr. Xiu Ting Hiew and Shawn Bateman

Ultrasound catheter placement in cats is an invasive procedure requiring heavy sedation or general anesthesia and often causes infection or injury to the urinary tract, as well as urethral tissue swelling and spasm. This can lead to discomfort in urination or recurrence of urinary blockage after catheter removal. An accurate and reliable non-invasive bladder volume estimation method that precludes the need for urinary catheter placement and its associated risks or complications would be valuable for monitoring of urine production in cats. This 3-D bladder volume estimation technique has the potential to be programmed into standard 3-D ultrasound machines, making non-invasive bedside bladder volume determination accessible to many veterinary clinicians and researchers in the future.

Is fechavirus an important feline health concern in Ontario?
Dr. Scott Weese

This will be the first investigation of the newly discovered feline fechavirus in Ontario. It will provide a baseline understanding of this virus in cats admitted to shelters and help determine whether this virus may play a role in shelter-acquired diarrhea.

AVIAN & EXOTIC HEALTH

Development of a vaccine against avian bornavirus
Dr. Leonardo Susta

Avian bornavirus (ABV) is an emerging virus that has been recently detected in an increasing number of avian species. Parrot bornavirus (ParBV) is the causative agent of proventricular dilatation disease (PDD), a lethal neurological disease, which has been linked to ABV. This research aims to develop an artificial version of ParBV that can be easily studied in the laboratory to improve understanding of how it causes disease in parrots, and to develop an attenuated version to be used as a vaccine against PDD.

YOUR GIFTS AT WORK

Each year, OVC Pet Trust invests $500,000 in new projects and equipment to advance health and well-being for pets.

COMPANION ANIMAL HEALTH

Making the most out of bone marrow biopsies
Dr. Dorothee Bienzle

It is often necessary to examine the bone marrow to distinguish diseases of the marrow itself from diseases in other organs that affect the marrow. Getting a biopsy of marrow is technically difficult and it is challenging to process good specimens for microscopic diagnosis. This research aims to produce an optimal, standardized and validated procedure for processing marrow samples, allowing for reliable diagnostic yield from sizeable samples.
Saying Goodbye: Sparka’s Story

By Sarah Bernardi, Veterinary Social Worker, RSW MSW

“I will never forget the day my parents and I went to the local Humane Society to pick out our first family pet. As we walked through the facility, dogs barked excitedly, wagging their tails in anticipation. The one that caught my eye, however, sat nervously at the back of her cage—this is the dog we would end up bringing home.

The dog we chose was a year old mixed-breed and full of energy! Her full name was Sparkly-Diamond (I was five and was going through a big princess phase) who we affectionately called ‘Sparka’. It did not take long for Sparka to become an integral part of our immediate and even extended family. Sparka had many memorable traits, some of which included zooming around the living room when she was excited; escaping the house acting like herself; we had family over and normally Sparka would be in the living room going from person to person waiting for a neck rub. Instead, she sat in the basement. She was lethargic and her breathing seemed laboured. That night, my parents slept on the living room floor next to her and in the morning they made me they decided on humane euthanasia for Sparka. I left work early and we spent the day doing everything she loved, like sitting on my parents’ bed and eating a small bowl of whipped cream.

The euthanasia experience was painful, to say the least. My immediate family, including myself, my mom, dad, and brother were in the room with her when she died. To this day, I have never seen my family collectively cry so hard.

When we came home, we sat together, cried and looked at pictures. I had plans to go away that weekend, which I quickly cancelled—it didn’t feel right to do anything but remember Sparka. This was the first time I had ever lost a pet and I found that grief very difficult to navigate. How could something so consistent and loving in your life just be taken away like that? Why did it feel different than losing a person? It almost felt worse.

Sometimes life has a funny way of taking us full circle. Today, I am very fortunate to be a veterinary social worker at OVC. My work has opened my eyes greatly and has offered a new perspective on pet loss. Part of my role as a clinical counsellor includes providing support to clients at OVC whose pets are sick or who have died. I am incredibly thankful that so many pet owners have been courageous enough to share their pets’ stories with me and that I get to support them through the process.

To anyone who has or is currently journeying through the loss of your pet, my message is this: please know that your grief is valid. People don’t always understand why we mourn so deeply for our furry family members, but that is only because they don’t understand the special relationship we have with them. Remember to take your time, take care of yourself and acknowledge your feelings—and reach out to a mental health professional if you need extra support.

I often reflect on my family’s experience losing Sparka. Sparka had such a unique personality and she spent so many transitional years by my family’s side—always there, always endlessly loving. I recognize that the loss of a pet is a different type of grief from the loss of a human. I still have a good cry for Sparka every so often, because I miss her dearly, but I can function with that grief now.

I can share memories and laugh without immense sadness.

Now, more than ever, I know that a pet is never “just a pet.” They are members of the family who provide us with unconditional love and kindness. I have Sparkly-Diamond to thank for that!

Making end-of-life decisions for your pet is one of the most difficult, challenging and emotional situations a pet owner may face over the lifetime of their beloved companion. Dealing with the loss of a pet can be difficult to navigate. OVC Pet Trust’s pet loss resources may be able to help. Now available: Preparing for the Loss of a Pet, Caring with the Loss of a Pet and Helping Children with the Loss of a Pet.

For a complete listing of pet loss support materials including: online communities; grief and bereavement resources; pet loss support groups; pet memorial ideas; suggested pet loss books and other online reading materials visit: www.pettrust.ca/petlossresources.
If you can dream it, you can do it. If you can visualize it, you can actualize it. This was something I told my students back in the 80s, and it was something I repeated to myself, after Tommy and I lost Blues to cancer over 20 years ago, on March 27, 2001. He was the sun and moon and stars to us. He was our Smiling Blue Skies. Many of you have read those words or heard me say them, and the questions that rose out of our grief were, “How can we help to change the journey for other heart dogs?” “How can we help the veterinary world find more and better ways to one day change the face of cancer for ALL of us?”

Well, $1,000 in the spring of 2001 paved the way to $2 million in 2021. And each step along the way has been all about you, our amazing community of supporters and volunteers. From coast to coast and further afield, we have seen amazing projects powered by children to annual events that have created their own special following. None of the work we have done, or will continue to do, would be possible without you.

Thanks to you, we will continue to fund oncology-related research projects and critical positions. While the world changes daily, one thing never changes for us: Smiling Blue Skies continues to offer 24/7 support to anyone whose life has been touched by cancer, even when that means finding new and creative ways to reach out.

And, when I revisit all the moments and touchstones through the years, in cards and letters and photos and videos, I think of each of you and all our dogs, our miracles with letters and photos and videos, I think of each. Each year we send more than 45,000 memorial letters to pet owners who have lost a pet. Gifts made in honour or in memory of a beloved pet support advancements in companion animal health at the Ontario Veterinary College.

Thank you to everyone who chooses to give back to improving and advancing companion animal health and well-being in this meaningful way.

Visit our website to learn how to make a gift at www.pettrust.ca/donate.

Dear OVC Pet Trust,

My cats Goodness and Mercy were omery. Well, they were feathr, realy. Life was hard for them because they were cats, forced to live with humans for security, and they never really liked it. Their mother lived in an apartment with other cats owned by someone who was almost never home. Goodness and Mercy loved my previous cat, who died when they were about eight years old. But although they were fond of me, they haunted the house silently, like shadows. They never purred, but I loved them dearly. Mercy died two years ago and Goodness died this spring, at 18 years old, after every organ had just worn out. She needed to go. The Midtown Mobile Veterinary Hospice Service was so good to her that her death was better than her life. I cried and cried, not because she was dead but because her life was so miserable. The thought of all those long gray years of cat-grief – the thought of all those cats who choose to give back to improving and advancing companion animal health and well-being in this meaningful way.

Share Your In Memory Story

Pets leave paw prints on our hearts. Have you recently lost a beloved companion whose memory has been honoured with a gift to OVC Pet Trust?

Connect with us on social media or contact us via email to share your story.

www.smilingblueskies.com
1. 11TH ANNUAL OTS DOG JOG
In March 2021 the OTS Dog Jog went virtual and raised more than $12,700 to support OVC Pet Trust. In photos: OVC 2022 student veterinarian Leigh Harrison and her dog Kikai; OVC 1980 alumna and OVC Pet Trust board chair Dr. Doreen Houston and her dog Obi; OVC 2013 alumna and OVC Pet Trust board member Dr. Rebecca Sterns and her dog Sadie.

2. THE 18TH ANNUAL SMILING BLUE SKIES VIRTUAL CALGARY WALK FOR CANINE CANCER
In May 2021 more than $38,000 was raised to support canine cancer care, education and discovery at the Ontario Veterinary College. In photo: Ninja, Morley and Ollie.

3. DOGUST
In August 2021 Ren’s Pets and their customers raised more than $16,000 to advance companion animal health through OVC Pet Trust. In photo: @thatcorgiwithhatail.

#PetTrustPals celebrates amazing supporters of OVC Pet Trust from across Canada! To share your event, tag your photos with #PetTrustPals on Facebook (facebook.com/ovcpet) and Twitter (@ovcpettrust) or email: ovcpet@uoguelph.ca.