

West Plano

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The Dallas Morning News



Tracking a pet trend

Specialized care is focus of Far N. Dallas veterinary center **8**

news



LIVE GRADUATION

Streaming allows families to attend via Internet **6**

COSTLY MISTAKE

Cellphones contribute to rise in accidental 911 calls **10**

sports



MAROON VS. WHITE

Wildcats' football tradition returns to PSHS **11**

a&e

LOCAL RESTAURANTS

Vietnamese tasty for fans of spicy or mild foods **12**

WILDFLOWER

70,000 expected at annual arts festival this weekend **13**

MUSIC CORPORATION

Plano Senior jazz choir to perform spring show **13**

community

FESTIVAL OF INDIA

Lions club to celebrate 25 years, raise funds **13**

Clinic offers pets specialized care

By SAEROM YOO
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Jamie Jennings of North Dallas has a special love for Newfoundlanders.

She's had nine and currently owns three, all of which are rescued animals. But because of their size — the dogs typically weigh 100 to 150 pounds — health issues such as hip dysplasia and heart disease are common, she said.

Veterinary Referral Center in Far North Dallas, where 26 doctors in five departments offer specialized medical care, has helped alleviate stress that comes with sick animals.

The clinic, which celebrated its 10th anniversary last weekend, opened with just 15 doctors. But as pets have taken on a more important role in the family in the last sev-

eral decades, Dr. Dennis Crow of Frisco said, today's pet owners demand the same type of care for their pets as they do for other family members.

The center has seen an average growth in the number of clients of at least 15 percent annually, said Suzi Berman, spokeswoman of the center.

And the rising trend can be seen across the country, said David Kirkpatrick of the American Veterinary Medical Association.

Kirkpatrick said total veterinary spending by U.S. dog owning households rose from \$4.9 billion in 1991 to \$16.1 billion in 2006, more than 200 percent adjusted for inflation. He said while a majority of the spending goes to general practice, the rising popularity and availability of specialized care contributes to the dollars spent.

MORE INFO

Veterinary Referral Center of North Texas

4444 Trinity Mills Road, Dallas
Call 972-407-9571 or visit
vrcnt.com

"It's just one more resource pet owners have to ensure the health of their pet," he said.

Kirkpatrick said there was a 15.5 percent jump in board certified specialists from 2006 to 2009. As of last year, there were a total of about 9,800 specialized veterinarians, he said.

Kathy James of West Plano tried everything when she noticed her playful Dachshund had itchy, watery eyes and ear infections.

"You could tell he was miserable," she said. "He acted like he was so depressed."

When changing Blue's food and



Staff photo by JENICE JOHNSON/neighborsgo

Dr. Reid Garfield

examines Debra Melin's dog Cooper at the Veterinary Referral Center in Far North Dallas. Cooper has a food allergy and his owner said she believes a chicken bone dropped over her fence was the cause of his skin reaction.

shampoo didn't work, she sought out Dr. Reid Garfield in the dermatology department. Blue now receives allergy shots once every two weeks and James says he's back to his happy self.

"Hopefully someday little Blue will out grow all of this," she said. "But until then we're going to make him as comfortable as possible."

The clinic only sees pets through referrals from family vets, who take care of the general practice procedures, such as vaccinations, spaying

or neutering. So by the time a pet owner reaches the Veterinary Referral Center, it's always something serious, which requires a special touch of compassion, Jennings said.

"They know how much the animal means to you and everyone is kind and loving to the animals, which is so important when you have a sick animal."

Contact Saerom Yoo, a neighborsgo editor, at 469-330-5685. Suzi Berman of D Media contributed to this report.