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## Veterinarians offer tips for keeping pets happy and healthy

by Sheila Grant

*Special to The Eastern Gazette*  
**NEWPORT** - Providing the right food, habitat, exercise, and healthcare, as well as knowing what to do in an emergency, can keep companion animals happy and healthy.

"Generally, you get what you pay for with pet food," said Dave Larkin, DVM, of Moosehead Trail Veterinary Hospital in Newport, who believes in balancing food more than paying attention to what's in it. "Some people pick the food with the most protein. The problem is that doesn't account for how much of the protein is digestible. Generally, higher-quality foods are more digestible."

And just as having too few nutrients could be harmful for a growing kitten or puppy, having too much of some nutrients can be detrimental to older pets with poor liver or kidney function. Too avoid high levels of protein, calcium, and phosphorus, a prescription food for senior pets may be best.

Vaccinations are key to pet health, as well. Dogs and cats need rabies and distemper vaccinations. Dog owners should also consider a shot to guard against leptospirosis, a bacteria that dogs can come in contact with in water or via wild animals (such as chasing mice or rats), that

can cause liver and kidney damage - and can be transmitted to humans. "It's hard to diagnose," said Larkin. "Unless the dog is never outside, I think the dog should have this vaccine."

Other vaccines that dog owners may opt to have administered include kennel cough, which, "we recommend for dogs that will be around other dogs outside the home, in doggie daycare, during puppy training, at the groomer, or even at the dog park," Larkin said. Another is for canine flu, especially for pets traveling outside of Maine.

For dogs that spend a great deal of time outdoors, especially in wooded areas, a vaccination against Lyme disease is also recommended. "It's important to remember that ticks can carry other diseases, as well, so folks should use a good tick control product," said Larkin.

Another vaccination for cat owners to consider if their pets go outdoors is feline leukemia. "What we are doing now for feline leukemia is vaccinating all kittens, just because people don't always know if it will go outdoors or escape and cats less than a year of age are more susceptible," Larkin explained. "If the cat is over a year old and does not go outdoors, I don't think they need it."

Parasite control is also impor-

tant. "Ticks spread disease, and fleas can transmit tape worms, or trigger allergies and skin problems," Larkin said. "A significant flea burden can slowly exsanguinate a dog or a cat." Many flea and tick deterrents can be applied to the skin of the pet, and taken orally. Veterinarians are starting to see some resistance to flea and tick products that have been around for a while, he said, so choosing a newer product may be more effective.

"Intestinal worms can be acquired through normal foraging behaviors outside and in the grass, or they get on the animal's skin and are then ingested through grooming," said Larkin. Symptoms include stomach upset, vomiting, loose stool, possible bloody stool, weight loss in an adult dog or failure to gain weight in a puppy, poor appetite, and sometimes worms are visible in vomit.

"Heartworms live in the bloodstream and cause problems with both dogs and cats," Larkin said. Heartworms are transmitted by mosquitoes, and are not as common a problem in this region of Maine as elsewhere, but, "I have diagnosed it in dogs that have never left the state," he said. Getting a pet screened annually is important, and before administering any heartworm deterrent, which could cause a serious reaction in an animal already infected. Once pets are infected, treatment of heartworms is both costly and a cause of many side effects, Larkin said.

Symptoms of heartworms in dogs include those similar to heart failure, such as coughing and exercise intolerance. In cats, symptoms may resemble asth-

ma. Cats can become symptomatic with just one worm, while in various sizes and breeds of dogs, it can take several worms to hundreds of them. There is no reliable annual test for heartworms in cats.

Just like humans, pets need physical and mental exercise to stay fit and happy. With dogs, the amount and type of exercise needed depend on breed. "I don't recommend people let dogs free-roam," noted Larkin. "There's always that chance they are going to get into trouble, get lost, run into a wild animal, or get into the road and get hit. It's important to have some kind of containment." Most felines can find enough play and mental stimulation with a few toys and some vertical integration such as a cat tower.

Something often overlooked is dental health. "Eighty percent of the animals we see here overall have some level of dental disease," said Larkin. "We know for a fact that if the mouth is infected and diseased, it is hard on the whole system. The animal is fighting infection on a constant basis, and there is a risk of it getting into the bloodstream and affecting the organs. In an older dog when we have to take out most of the teeth, they actually feel better once they've healed up. I've had clients say they don't know what they will do with all of the dog's newfound energy!"

Owners can do dental home care, "the best of which is brushing the teeth once a day, assuming the pet will allow it," Larkin said. If not, there are chew toys and water additives that promote dental health. "At some point most pets get to the point

that they need a dental cleaning to halt or reverse dental disease. We do that. Dogs and cats require general anesthesia because they have to be immobilized for us to do an effective job."

As pets age, there are additional considerations, such as pain management, and liver and kidney function. Changes in food and water consumption, activity level, and new skin problems are all worth investigation. Often, a change of diet and/or prescription medications are available to make your aging pet more comfortable and healthy, Larkin said.

For more information about Moosehead Trail Veterinary Hospital call 368-4076 or visit [www.mooseheadvet.com](http://www.mooseheadvet.com).



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DAVE LARKIN, DVM, with his dog, Ruby. (Photo courtesy of Moosehead Trail Veterinary Hospital)

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# Spaying and neutering contribute to pet health

by Sheila Grant  
Special to The Eastern Gazette  
**PENQUIS AREA** - While the main concern is reducing the number of cats and dogs in shelters, proponents of spaying and neutering note that there are many health benefits for pets, and programs to help pet owners afford the procedures.

"The health benefits are different for males and females," said Dave Larkin, DVM, of Moosehead Trail Veterinary Hospital in Newport. "If an animal is not going to be bred, the current wisdom is that it's best to spay females before the first heat cycle, the reason being that older unspayed females have more estrogen and are at risk of getting mammary tumors." Larkin said he has never seen this condition

in a pet that was spayed before its first heat cycle.

"Another risk is pyometra, a massive infection of the uterus that is life threatening and requires emergency surgery," Larkin said. "That usually happens when a pet is older." Six months of age is a convenient time to get pets spayed prior to the first heat cycle, he said.

While the medical benefits of neutering male animals are less compelling, there are some, and the procedure helps with behavior issues. "A lot of it is curtailing roaming behavior," Larkin said. A male dog looking for receptive females may leave the yard and be at increased risk for getting lost, being hit by cars, or fighting with wildlife or other pets. During his work in an emergency

care clinic for pets, "I did see a lot of dog versus car and cat versus car and 80 percent of those were intact male dogs," said Larkin. Additionally, male pets can't get testicular cancer, and neutered dogs do not get prostatitis, which can cause problems with urination and defecation, and once developed, "the only effective treatment is to neuter them at that point," he said.

Perhaps the most compelling reason is overpopulation, however. "The bottom line is that we don't need any more cats and dogs," said Mary Shapleigh of the nonprofit organization P.E.T.S. (Prevent Euthanasia Through Sterilization) in Dover-Foxcroft. "Shelters are overloaded because there are not enough homes, and this is the reason animals, espe-

cially cats, get dumped."

There are resources available for low-income pet owners to make spaying and neutering more affordable. One is the statewide Help Fix ME program, which provides vouchers from the state to have cats operated on for \$10, and pit bull or pit mix dogs for \$20. "It takes about a month to get the voucher, so people don't want to procrastinate if their pet is reaching maturity," Shapleigh said. Call 1-800-367-1317 for more information on Help Fix ME.

The Cleo Fund also provides spay/neuter vouchers based on income." Rates vary by region, with cats costing between \$20 and \$33; \$50 for dogs less than 75 pounds and \$60 for larger dogs. Occasionally, special campaigns are offered during which cats can be spayed/neutered for as little as \$5. Purebred, designer, and purchased dogs are excluded from the program, with the exception of pit bulls. The animals also get a rabies vaccine during the visit. There is no income requirement for people seeking spay/neuter vouchers for free cats. There is only one clinic, in Freeport, that accepts the Cleo vouchers, but P.E.T.S. does provide transportation for local animals on designated days, Shapleigh said.

Owners can also transport their own pets directly to the Community Spay/Neuter Clinic in Freeport. "Their number is 865-0772, and Dr. Stone has spayed and neutered over 18,000 pets in the four-and-a-half years she's been open," said Shapleigh. Call 773-6221 for more information about the Cleo Fund.

Additionally, people receiving financial assistance from the state can bring proof of that to the Bangor Humane Society to receive a voucher toward spay/neuter costs. "They should call their veterinarian's office to be sure their vet accepts that voucher, and to find out how much they have to pay beyond what the voucher covers," Shapleigh said.

P.E.T.S., which has been working in this region since 1991, also offers a reduced-cost spay/neuter program. The all-volunteer group does raises its own funds through yard sales, plant sales, wreath sales, and its annual lasagna dinner scheduled from 4 to 6 p.m. on Saturday, April 25 at the Congregational Church in Dover-Foxcroft. The menu includes a variety of lasagnas, salad, beverages, and desserts. The cost is \$6.50 for adults; \$3.25 for children under age 12. All proceeds assist with spaying/neutering of companion animals.

"We do apply for grants, but we don't always get them because we're a small organization," Shapleigh said. The organization could use donated, gently-used animal crates -- and money "Everything helps, even a dollar or two. And if anyone wants to sponsor a cat or dog, they can earmark their donation to go just toward that."

Donations may be mailed to P.E.T.S., P.O. Box 912, Guilford, ME 04443. For more information about P.E.T.S., call Shapleigh at 564-8092 or visit <http://rosaleen.wix.com/pets>. For more information about spay/neuter assistance in Maine, visit [www.spaymaine.org](http://spaymaine.org).

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REPAIRING FENCE is a frequent activity for horse owners. (Grant photo)

## Horses require more commitment than many pets

by Sheila Grant

*Special to The Eastern Gazette*  
DOVER-FOXCROFT - Horseback riding can be a terrific hobby, calorie burner, stress reliever, social activity, and a skill that provides a lifetime of enjoyment, an educational edge for college students in animal-related fields, and even lucrative employment for young people who learn to give lessons, ride boarded horses for busy owners, and house/horse back when owners are away, said Gail McCormack, owner of Infinity Farm in Dover-Foxcroft.

McCormack, 50, has been involved with horses since age 10 and has owned them since her early 20s. Infinity Farm boards and trains horses and people of all ages, and in all disciplines, including English, Western, jumping, and dressage for all skill levels. The farm has a working student program that allows students to pay cash for some lessons while earning others by doing chores. A large indoor riding rink allows students to practice year-round.

Owning a horse, which can live to age 35 and beyond, is a 24/7, 365 commitment, McCormack said. Day-to-day care includes feeding, watering, brushing, turning the horses in and out, as well as stall, barn and fence maintenance.

Horses need between five and 20 gallons of fresh water every day, and in winter, water must be thawed or ice must be chopped through. "A lot of people find that horses get colic because they are not getting enough water," McCormack said. "And we feed hay 24/7 here. It is always available because horses are grazers made for a lot of little feedings rather than one big one." A horse can eat 50 pounds, about one bale, of hay daily. Some horses are also given grains to help with weight gain and stamina. A bale of hay can cost \$4 and up. To avoid illness, the hay must be good quality and free of mold.

Not every horse needs shoes, but they do need hoof care on a regular basis. Horses also need annual exams, veterinarian

visits for illness, treatment for worms, vaccinations, and more.

"Routine vaccines are very important, by far the biggest one being rabies," said Dr. Ronald Miles of Foxcroft Veterinary Services. "Horses have one of the highest incidence of rabies, and they do bite and get aggressive when they have it. They are always out to pasture so their exposure rate is incredibly high." Other vaccines include West Nile virus, Eastern Equine Encephalitis, and tetanus. Horses that will be around other horses may require additional vaccines. First vaccines should take place between three and 6 months of age, and annually thereafter.

One of the biggest health issues faced by horses and their owners is colic, "which just means abdominal pain," said Miles. The causes range from fairly harmless to very serious. "The most common cause is impaction, or gas. If you give too much grain it can cause colic -- I've seen them eat 50 pounds of grain at one setting and it's devastating when they do that." Sometimes more serious conditions, such as a twisted bowel that needs surgical correction, can be the culprit.

Owners should take heed if a horse is staring at or kicking at its abdomen, rolling excessively, or has gone off its feed. Prepared owners will know how to take a horse's temperature and heart rate, and be able to gauge normal versus abnormal gut sounds. Having this information at hand when calling the vet can save time in diagnosing and treating your horse. Horse owners should also have first aid supplies on hand to treat cuts, and should be vigilant

about eye injuries, which are not uncommon and should always be discussed with a vet, he said.

Dental care is also very important to horse health. Once adult teeth come in, they continue to grow until they are worn out. Teeth can grow too long or develop sharp points if not tended to. Veterinarians are trained in horse dentistry, Miles said, and there are also equine dentistry specialists. As teeth wear out, appropriate adjustments to feed may extend life by three to five years.

Choosing the right horse, and having both rider and horse properly educated, is key to enjoyable horse ownership, McCormack said. Many people want to own a younger horse in order to let their child grow up with the animal.

"They are in it for the long haul if they go that route," she said. "A green horse and a green rider -- that's the longest journey off. A rider has to be knowledgeable to bring a horse along. Riders have to take lessons in order to stay in balance with the horse. It takes a year to get to know your horse, and training is constant.

Every time you ride your horse, you are either training or un-training. Some people come in to get training for a horse that's 'already trained,' and we have to go back to fix the foundation work. Without that, you are going to run into problems down the road. I try to educate the horse and the rider. I can ride and get the horse to do things, but if the owner gets on and doesn't have the knowledge, they won't get the same results."

Some horses master foundation training within a few months, while others take longer. Once the foundation is established, it just takes time and experience to season horse and rider. If a horse is taking an especially long time, "there's usually a physical issue going on," McCormack said. "Is the horse physically comfortable? Is the tack appropriate, and not ill-fitting or with the wrong bit? It goes back to teaching people about appropriate tack and rider position. Ninety-eight percent of the time, it's rider position and the effectiveness of rider position, and that's why people take lessons. I still take lessons -- you

always gain more knowledge and depth."

New horse owners can be tempted by the lower price of green animals and DIY training, but, "there's no such thing as a free horse," McCormack said. "You have to look at what you want to do -- if you want to compete, if you want a really safe, happy horse, sometimes you have to put the money into it to get something a professional has trained."

For a sound, trained horse within the desirable 8-to-12 age bracket, expect to pay \$5,000 and up, she said. "I've gotten horses for less, but I have to educate them," notes McCormack. "And it is so much easier to train a horse that knows nothing than to re-train a horse that was not appropriately trained."

For more information about Foxcroft Veterinary Services, call 564-2144 or visit [www.foxcroftveterinaryservice.com](http://www.foxcroftveterinaryservice.com). For more information about Infinity Farm, call 564-7046 or visit [www.infinityfarm.net](http://www.infinityfarm.net).



WINTER-TIME HORSE OWNERSHIP means getting out to chop through ice so animals have access to fresh water. (Grant photo)

# Business is doggone good for Guilford couple

by Sheila Grant

Special to The Eastern Gazette  
DOVER-FOXCROFT - Listening to that tiny voice that tells us to follow a dream can sometimes pay off. Just ask Cynthia Scott, who gave up her job as executive director of Pine Tree Hospice to open a doggie daycare on January 1, 2010. During the five years since, Cynthia's husband Russell has been able to retire after 35 years with the Maine Department of Conservation to help run the business, and Fresh Air Dogs has had only 11 days in all that time that canine guests weren't visiting. The business has provided several part-time jobs over the years, and has supported other pet-related services, including the Fairfield-based mobile dog grooming service Primp My Paws, which comes to the doggie daycare to work with guests on a regular basis.

Fresh Air Dogs, a state licensed and insured doggie daycare, is "a place for dogs to do what dogs like to do and get lots of pampering, too." Daily pack walks, swims, games of fetch and more, under the Scotts' supervision, are all part of the Fresh Air Dogs experience.

"And in May of 2012 we hired our first employee. We have had more since, to help with cleaning, office work, that kind of thing." The Scotts' first employee, Carol Morin, of Sebec, still works at Fresh Air Dogs, and provides much of the activity and supervision to keep canine guests busy, happy and safe.

"Russell and I have always been animal lovers," Cynthia Scott said. "When we got our first dog I don't think we'd been married more than a couple of weeks." The couple has decades of experience caring for, and training, canines.

The Scotts got to know the owners of Four K's Golden Kennels near their former home in Farmington, and eventually began assisting with dog obedience classes. When the Four K's owners moved in 1983, the Scotts took over and became Good News Dog Obedience. Training and socialization are still important aspects of their work.

"If your dog is trained you have control and you can take your dog more places; you will welcome you bringing your dog more places if it is well behaved," Scott said. Putting in the time to

train a pet with consistent commands and maintain that training pays off. "I think all dogs want to please their owners."

Since retiring, Russell Scott has completed two dog-training internships with Pat Miller of Peaceable Paws in Maryland, specializing in positive reinforcement, behavior modification and helping fearful dogs. He offers evening classes through the Piscataquis Valley Adult Education Co-operative, beginning a new series every couple of months, or whenever there are enough names on the waiting list.

"One thing that makes us unique is that because we are trainers, the dogs can't help being trained every single day," Cynthia Scott said. "They have to sit before we open the door, before they get a treat. Some come here already well behaved; some are just puppies. We expect the same things out of them and work with them. They are constantly having to learn what I call petiquette."

Scott said it is very important for people to start working with a professional trainer sooner, rather than later, because it is easier to teach a puppy good habits than it is to retrain an older dog to break bad habits and then learn more positive behaviors.

"We hear people say all the time that they don't know how to train their dog," said Scott. "But you are training your dog all the time, so what are you training your dog to do?" Dogs pay close attention to everything their owners do and take their cues from human behavior, she said. By coming for obedience training as soon as a pup joins the



GUESTS AT FRESH AIR DOGS patiently wait for Carol Morin, and Russell and Cynthia Scott to hand out treats during morning playtime on March 9. (Grant photo)

household, or even beforehand, "the whole family can be on the same page about what the rules are going to be."

"Without consistency in rules, as well as in voice and hand commands, owners are simply teaching their pets to be confused, she said. Visiting the Scotts before getting a puppy can also help a family avoid getting the wrong kind of dog, she said.

"We've had people call us that just really picked the wrong dog for their family," said Scott. "If you live in a small home, and you pick a really big dog, and you don't even have a yard for them to play in and can't just open the door and let them run, it might be better to get a smaller dog. Elderly people, too, have gotten a Lab with so much energy, and they'll say, 'He's already pulled me down three or four times.' It's harder to make a different deci-

sion if you've already brought the dog home and fallen in love with it. We try to help people think it through. Just because you loved a Lab you had when you were 20, does not mean that when you are 80, that's necessarily a good choice."

In addition to obedience training, the Scotts have trained their own two golden doodles, Barkley and Emma, as therapy animals and are happy to help other people working toward therapy dog certification for their pets.

Fresh Air Dogs also provides overnight and extended stay services, and even pick-up service if the dog is coming from far away. In the house, pets are not kennelled (unless owners are working on crate training) and may claim couches, chairs and beds on a first come, first served basis. A large, fenced play area outside can be reconfigured into as many

as five smaller spaces to meet the needs of dogs of various sizes, ages, health, and play styles.

"Anyone that has any special request, we will entertain that request," Scott said. "We will work out an individualized plan for people. We have taken dogs that have had surgery and need to be with someone during the day after, and we've taken dogs on hospice. Those dogs require a lot of extra care and quiet. We can't always take whatever someone calls with - it just depends on what else is going on here."

Despite advertising only through social media and word-of-mouth since 2011, Fresh Air Dogs averages a dozen guests per day.

"The thing that means the most to me, and that happens all the time, is that so many people who come are so glad to find a place where their dog is at home, and not going to be in a kennel," Scott said. "We have had about 700 dogs here for daycare and overnights, and we get new dogs every single week."


Vacation weeks fill up fast; Scott advised calling sooner rather than later. For more information about Fresh Air Dogs, call 564-2604 or visit [www.FreshAirDogs.com](http://www.FreshAirDogs.com) or <http://www.facebook.com/FreshAirDogs>.



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# PhoDOgraphy: the love of pets and pictures combined

by Sheila Grant

Special to The Eastern Gazette

**DEXTER** - Diane Parola of Dexter has loved photography since her stint on the yearbook committee in high school. After graduation, she did some freelance photography for local newspapers, but it remained mostly a hobby.

"I have done a few weddings for friends and family, sporting events and church functions," she said, "but I hadn't thought about getting into it as a business. There are a lot of photographers out there and my work didn't stand out."

Also, Parola said she was never really comfortable posing human subjects, and she was hesitant to pursue a second job that would consume weekends on top of her full-time employment with Maine Highlands Federal Credit Union. But when the family took in a buff-colored cocker spaniel named Trooper two decades ago who loved to have his picture taken, Parola's interest in photography was reawakened.

"He was a great dog," she said. "I would say Trooper got me started with the idea of photographing dogs. I temporarily gave up on the idea when Trooper died because I had convinced myself it sounded a bit silly. Then, when we got Cali, a black and white Springer spaniel in 2007, I got the itch again."

Cali, however, ran in the opposite direction whenever she saw the camera. Instead, Parola asked coworkers to bring their dogs to her basement studio as practice subjects. Calidoodle PhoDOgraphy has since grown through word-of-mouth advertising. Parola recently launched a new website and hired an assistant. Like many home businesses owners in this region, Parola struggles with slow Internet service. "I don't have a lot of pics on there yet because uploading from my house is extremely slow," she said. "I just have to go to a friend's house for this, or somewhere with free Wi-Fi." Customers can purchase photos directly from the site once they have been uploaded.

"I have an assistant, Ramona Flint, who has been a valuable part of these sessions," Parola said. "She loves dogs as much as I do, and can get them settled down where I need them."

"I've learned a lot and found that I much prefer to pose dogs than people," she continued. "I have been asked to take pictures of people's children with their dog and I will say 'Sorry, I don't do people.' A regular photographer can do that."

Some of Parola's tips for DIY pet photographers include getting in close to the dog's love, make silly noises, and be ready to snap those pictures quickly!

"I have found that dogs respond to sounds differently," she said. "Some will give me that cute little tip of the head while others just perk up their ears. Either way, I am ready with a quick click of my camera - or rather, several clicks!"

Parola, a self-described perfectionist, takes a lot of pictures.

"I am sensitive to the amount of time I spend 'bothering' dogs, though," she said. "I can tell when they just aren't interested anymore and will give them a

break."

When Fresh Air Dogs doggie daycare opened in Guilford [see *Business is doggone good for Guilford Couple*, page 14], Parola couldn't resist the pull of so many pooches in one place. "Cynthia Scott of Fresh Air Dogs invited me to set up my studio in her garage a couple of times. This provided a wide range of dog breeds to work with."

At her own home studio, Parola has backgrounds of various colors and props to use with her canine subjects. "Also, I have recently purchased new lighting that has been a huge help," she said.

"I need a fairly big space to set up and it isn't always easy to get this," Parola said. "I have done a couple of sessions at All Breed Groom and Board [in Sebec] recently. I would love to find a space in Dexter or Dover-Foxcroft to use for a day. I have also set up at Paws on Parade in Bangor, and will definitely do that again. That was fun!"

Each work environment presents its own set of challenges, but Parola prefers studio photography. Another challenge is photographing two or more dogs together, which takes a lot of patience and owner assistance.

"Once when trying different noises to get a group of five dogs' attention all at the same time, I decided to meow like a cat," she said. "Bad idea! They all came at me at once!"

Regardless of the challenges, Parola loves doing canine photography.

"A lot of people that feel their dog is like a member of the family," she said, "and who doesn't want pictures of their family?"

A bit of "photography" might be the dog owner's idea, or a surprise gift from friends or family who "kidnap" the dog for a top-secret photo shoot.

"I'm hoping people will catch on to the idea of an actual photographer," she said. "There are many photographers out there that will do dogs, but not that



**POSING POOCHES** - Diane Parola would much rather pose pooches than people. (Photo courtesy of Calidoodle PhoDOgraphy)

only do dogs. That's just where my passion is - I feel they are just more fun than photographing people!"

For more information, visit [www.calidoodle.com](http://www.calidoodle.com) or <https://www.facebook.com/Calidoodle-PhodoPhotography>



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