

James Cromwell, notable actor and animal activist, has insightfully stated, "Pets are humanizing. They remind us that we have an obligation and responsibility to preserve and nurture and care for all life." Because of their domesticated situation, these special companions rely wholly upon their human counterparts to provide for their every need. When critical care is necessary, this may require the expertise of the trained professionals at the local VCA (Veterinary Centers of America) Animal Specialty Center of South Carolina.



Left to right William Draper, April Rees, Lauren Jones

VCA Animal Specialty Center of South Carolina: When Four-Footed Companions Need Critical Care

by Marilyn Thomas

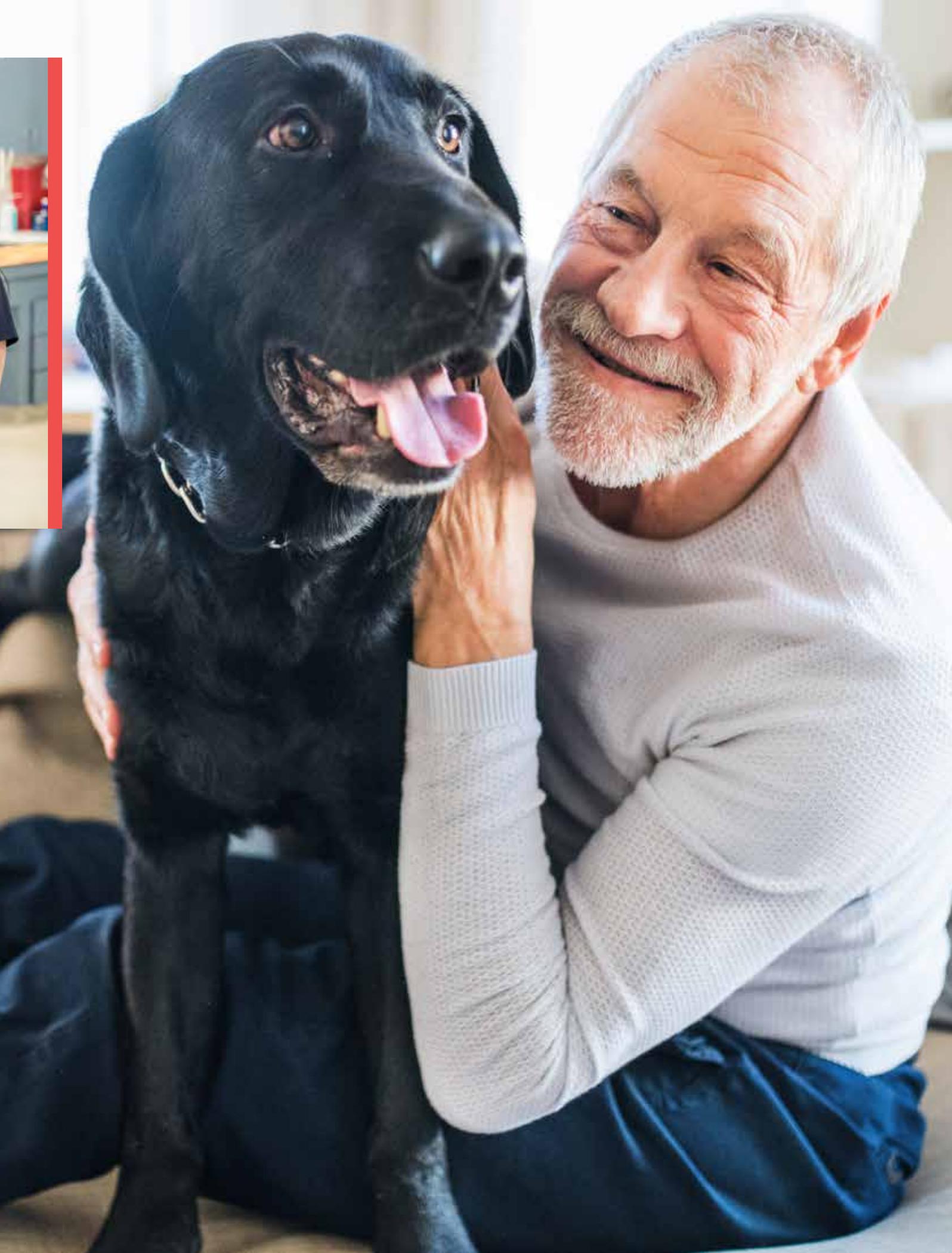
According to the American Pet Products Association, a leading source of reliable statistics in their field, 68 percent of American households have pets. Thus, many people seek to experience that extraordinary and beneficial bond that can only exist between humans and their four-legged friends. Although an animal companion can be a special source of unconditional love and enjoyment, the American Veterinary Medical Association reminds owners that "the benefits of pet ownership come with responsibilities," and one of those obligations is to maintain appropriate health care.

When a pet has a critical medical need, the VCA Animal Specialty Center of South Carolina, situated within the greater Columbia area, offers daily ap-

pointments during the week and is also available after hours for emergency situations. Its website at vcahospitals.com/south-carolina-surgery offers more information about hours, services, and the professionals who work there.

"In order to ensure the best care for your pet and to use your time efficiently, we do require referrals from your family veterinarian," explains April Rees, the VCA hospital manager.

"The biggest challenge we face is providing the highest quality of medicine that is still within the financial reach of those we aim to serve," says Lauren Jones, the VCA's assistant hospital manager. "Our hospital provides 24-hour care, superior anesthesia monitoring, highly trained technicians, board-certified doctors, state-



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of-the-art equipment, and the list goes on. We strive to meet and exceed the quality of medicine and care you would receive from a human hospital.”

Although currently located at 3912 Fernandina Road, the original practice “was established by Dr. Randy Basinger in 1989” at another site, says manager Rees. “We moved here in 2009 and have continued to grow since Dr. Basinger’s retirement in 2012.”

The proverbial baton was passed on to the hospital’s present medical director and neurologist Dr. William Draper, when he joined the VCA in August 2012. His impressive credentials include a

bachelor’s degree in biological sciences; a doctorate in veterinary medicine (DVM); internships in small animal medicine, surgery, and neurology; and a residency in neurology and neurosurgery.

Generally, “We are a ‘small animal’ facility - dogs and cats,” says Dr. Draper. “However, we occasionally work with the local zoos and wildlife preserves in South Carolina.” Because of its central location within the state, “It is common for us to see patients all the way from Augusta and Myrtle Beach,” he adds.

“We frequently see the extreme cases, the long and difficult surgical cases, the cases with rare brain disorders, and the occasional exotic animal,” says assistant Jones. “We have also been recognized by our local sheriff’s department for working with its K9 department.”

“We currently provide surgery, neurology, and rehabilitation services,” she adds. “Our hospital is here to help with cases when your family veterinarian has exhausted their hospital’s options. Some examples of our more common procedures include cruciate rupture repairs, fracture repairs, foreign body removals (when your pet eats something they weren’t supposed to), tumor removals, hernia repairs, and spinal surgeries like hemilaminectomies and ventral slot surgeries.”

Another characteristic that makes this clinic unique is that it also functions as a teaching hospital. “We are one of the only, if not the only, veterinary hospital in South Carolina that provides internships to veterinarians who are pursuing board certification,” says Jones. “Having these interns with us forces our doctors to be up to date on the latest research in their fields and to stay sharp on their basic skills as they teach the up-and-coming generations.”

Furthermore, the clinic is accredited by



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the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA). “They create and hold a higher standard than just what is required by law – giving the highest standard of care,” explains Jones.

“We make every effort to comfort our clients and their pets, not only while they are in our hospital but during every interaction we have,” she concludes. “We aspire to treat everyone we come in contact with as family, and patient care is always our top priority.” For the future, “Our vision is to continue to grow and provide support to our community and the community’s pets.”

As the owner and clinical director of Grace Animal Hospital in Lexington, South Carolina, Dr. Tim Loonam, DVM, says, “My associates and I routinely refer patients to VCA Animal Specialty Center, and we have great collegial working relationships with their excellent specialists and staff. We also regularly attend the veterinary continuing education seminars that are put on at no charge for local veterinarians.”

“I consider the veterinarians there



friends as well as professional colleagues,” he adds, “They’re a great resource and have always made themselves available for advice. Some of the specialists have actually assisted me with cases at my own hospital.”

Another local veterinarian, Dr. Cameron Barkley of Millcreek Animal Hospital, also located in Lexington, says, “I refer patients [to VCA] who require a specialized surgery or medical workup that exceeds the capacity of a general practice.” As examples, she mentions “specialized orthopedic cases or compli-

cated neurologic cases.”

“I have worked with VCA since before it was VCA upon my graduation from veterinary school in 2000,” Dr. Barkley adds. “The doctors and staff have helped us with complex cases and my own animals on many occasions with successful outcomes.”

“Having a specialty practice close by enables us to provide the best possible care for our patients,” she concludes, “and enhance the quality and quantity of life for these pets as well as the bond they have with their humans.” ■

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