

Vet Doc Helps Four-Legged Friends Gain Strength, Health

■ Using Holistic and High-Tech Modalities

By Joan Elliott
Missourian Feature Writer

The animals who come to the Animal Fitness Center in Union think they're at a party. That's not surprising, given the fun things that await them there.

Wading in a "pool," rolling on big balls, getting warmed with infrared light and being given healthy treats are among their surprises.

But even though it feels like a party, in reality, they're having the benefit of Dr. Ava Frick's quarter century of loving and learning to care for animals. They leave, not with candies and balloons but, rather, with bodies that feel and work a lot better.

"Animals only live for the moment," said Dr. Frick, owner of the fitness center, located at 1841 Denmark Road. "If they feel good that's all they know. My goal is to improve the 'now.'"

Dr. Frick graduated from the University of

Missouri College of Veterinary Medicine in 1980. Later she became certified in Animal Chiropractic by the American Veterinary Chiropractic Association and also had training in rehabilitation therapy, pain management, massage, trigger point therapy and micro-nutrient and herbal support.

It was about six years ago that her veterinary practice made a major shift and she moved into holistic medicine.

"I was getting close to 40 and I started looking at life differently," she said. "I had a sort of midlife professional shift."

The impetus for that shift came when she was treating a dachshund with a painful back. "I thought, 'I can give this dog medicine (to cover up the pain) but I can't fix the problem.'"

That's when she set out to find ways to actually fix problems and help animals regain their strength and mobility. She said she is the only

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— Dr. Ava Frick

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one in the state doing this kind of work.

Dr. Frick's fitness center has an exercise room with steps to climb, a treadmill, exercise ball, trampoline and toys. It also has pain management and rehabilitation equipment.

A high-tech pulse signal therapy (PST) machine is very effective in treating neuromuscular degeneration and arthritis.

"Arthritis causes 'trash' to settle in joints," she said. Her bio-magnetic resonance machine, which is similar to an MRI, creates positive and negative charges that move materials from the joints.

"Once an animal has had the treatment its improvement will last from six months to two years," Dr. Frick said.

She also does Alpha-Stim microcurrent electrical therapy to speed healing of wounds. She uses ultrasound both for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes, the latter related to relaxing tissue. Laser equipment with far-infrared light waves helps reduce swelling and to treat acupuncture points.

Hydrotherapy

In another room Dr. Frick has an underwater treadmill that moves at speeds ranging from .3 to 5 mph. An informational display on the 500-gallon holding tank shows the speed, distance and calories burned.

The treadmill is housed in a glass case with an entry/exit door at one end. Water is pumped in until it reaches the animal's shoulders and, since the animal wears a life vest, its legs can hang freely. For an animal that has been experiencing pain, that offers tremendous relief.

The first time an animal is in the water treadmill he's a bit apprehensive so Dr. Frick goes in with him, massaging the animal's muscles and encouraging him to start using his legs again. Especially for animals with arthritic conditions this joint movement, without the pull of gravity, is especially effective. So far the water treadmill has been used only for dogs and one cat (who preferred to walk backward instead of forward).

After the first treatment, she said, the animal is very excited about having a treatment and starts pulling its owner as soon as they get out of the car.

After the treatment, the water is drained, put through four filters and purified, before being recycled. Chemical levels are checked regularly.

"I treat almost anything



Aaaah Relief!

Dr. Ava Frick, veterinarian extraordinaire and owner of the Animal Fitness Center in Union, gives her dog Cheerio a chiropractic adjustment, then stretches one hind leg that was giving him trouble. Dr. Frick practices holistic medicine with animals, focusing on rehabilitation, pain management and nutrition.

Missourian Photo.

that's non-responsive to traditional medicine, even anxiety, insomnia and depression," Dr. Frick said. "I studied pain management, physical therapy and other treatment for humans, then transposed what I learned from bipeds to quadrupeds."

The center also has two examining rooms with tables to accommodate the size of the animals. Here, in addition to checking the animal, she does massage, acupuncture and chiropractic adjustments, then creates a plan to deal with injuries, pain and nutritional deficiencies.

From Near and Far

Since Dr. Frick is the only veterinarian in this part of the country to do these types of pain and rehabilitation treatments, she has people who drive for four hours to bring their pets to her. She also does telephone consultations with people in other states, then ships equipment to them to use.

The latest in Dr. Frick's repertoire of specialties is her online talk show on www.voiceamerica.com, broadcast live on Wednesday mornings at 10 a.m. Her top-

ics relate to veterinary rehabilitation and holistic care.

"I talk about what we do here and select a guest for each show," she said. "People can only watch it on their computer (unless they have special TV equipment) but they can call in live at 1-888-335-5204 if they have a question."

Dr. Frick also has written manuals on general pet examination and medical terminology, CPR and emergency care, and technical articles on the various aspects of neurological issues.

Speaking at conferences, lecturing to veterinary groups and learning new techniques, in addition to a large practice here in the Union area more than adequately fills Dr. Frick's life.

"The variety is fun," she said. "What I'm doing is 'on the edge,' out there, things that nobody else has done."

"This isn't work for me. It's my life, my purpose. I want to give animals the capacity to feel good and be healthier than they otherwise would be, to help them so their bodies can do what they need to do."