

The Cat Practice opens state's first pet hospice in Birmingham

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Pets are living longer, just like people. But for pet families, this means facing sometimes difficult end-of-life decisions when pets get old, develop a serious illness or just need help getting around.

In 2011, Troy resident Maryann Clark faced such a decision when her 17-year-old brown tabby cat Rocky was diagnosed with heart disease, and in 2009 when her 16-year-old calico Purrdy developed kidney failure and heart disease. For many pet owners with seriously ill or aging pets, euthanasia has been the only choice. She instead wanted her felines to live as long as possible assuming that they were still active and could enjoy good quality of life.

Clark got her wish at The Cat Practice veterinary hospital in Birmingham where her cats were among the first patients to receive hospice and end-of-life care. Rocky and Purrdy, whose hospice care was chronicled for friends and family on Facebook, have since gone on to "kitty heaven." And now, The Cat Practice wants to give more pet owners the same choice by opening what is believed to be Michigan's first pet hospice.

"Helping your feline friend through a final illness is definitely worth the effort," Clark says. "Especially when they know that the treatments you provide are making them feel better."



The Cat Practice hospice will offer end-of-life care, modeled after human hospice that alleviates physical discomfort and provides a caring end-of-life experience for the pet and the pet's family. Like human hospice, The Cat Practice hospice is for families whose pets face an incurable condition, but can still enjoy quality of life. Instead of curative treatment, pets receive palliative, or comfort care, that includes medication for pain and discomfort, physical affection, favorite foods and extra time with family members.

Pets in the hospice program receive care at home under the direction of Laura Kramek, veterinary hospice nurse and licensed veterinary technician (LVT). She has been with The Cat Practice since 1993 and is a graduate of Michigan State University.

Families are taught how to administer care and have a regular pipeline to Kramek for guidance and support. They also get reduced pricing on office visits and pet pain medications. Psychologist Dr. Camille Greenwald, who works with The Cat Practice, is available for grief counseling. Future plans include a memory wall on the hospital's website for remembering deceased pets.

"Cats are living 20 years and more," says Kramek. "Conditions once considered untreatable — kidney failure, heart disease, diabetes, thyroid disease — can all be managed today. As more pets are viewed as family members, their families are looking for options to euthanasia while their pet still enjoys good quality of life.

To help pet owners prepare for caring for an aging pet, The Cat Practice is holding a workshop series, Caring for Aging Kitties.

The next workshop is Pet Hospice Care on June 13 and Pet Loss and Grieving is June 27. Donations of \$10 are requested per workshop with proceeds going to The Cat Practice's Rufus Memorial Feline Fund for cats in need. To register, go to www.thecatpracticepc.com or call 248-540-3390. The Cat Practice, which opened in 1981, cares exclusively for feline patients, but any pet owner is welcome to attend the workshops. The Cat Practice provides advanced preventative and medical care with an emphasis on early detection.

FYI

The Cat Practice, 875 South Worth in Birmingham. Visit www.thecatpracticepc.com or call 248-540-3390.

It is open seven days a week and evenings.

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