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May is National Pet Month

Birmingham veterinary hospital starts Michigan's first pet hospice to care for aging and terminally ill pets

End-of-life workshop series for pet families starts May 16

Birmingham, Michigan, May 2, 2012 – 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. Clark instead wanted her felines to live as long as possible assuming that they were still active and could enjoy good quality of life.



Rocky and Purrdy

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 Face book, 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 The Cat Practice **veterinary hospice nurse Laura Kramek**. Families are taught how to administer care and have a regular pipeline in 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 will hold a four-part workshop series, ***Caring for Aging Kitties, starting May 16.*** Kramek will speak on Caring for Geriatric Cats (May 16), Making End-of-Life Decisions (May 30) and Pet Hospice Care (June 13), and Greenwald on Pet Loss and Grieving (June 27). Donation is \$10 per workshop or \$25 for the series 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 cares exclusively for feline patients, but any pet owner is welcome and will benefit from the workshops.

The American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) says on its website that "Many pet owners welcome the possibility of being able to provide hospice or palliative care for their pets when it is made available." AAHA defines hospice as "A system which provides compassionate comfort care to patients at the end of their lives and also supports their families in the bereavement process."

"Emotionally speaking, losing a pet is not very different than losing anyone else we love," says Dr. Greenwald. "Therefore, having some understanding of the normal grieving process and commonly associated feelings can help people navigate their way through what is a painful but very natural and normal life process."

While The Cat Practice just recently formalized its hospice program, the hospital has been providing clients and their felines with options for end-of-life care for a number of years. In fact, it was clients asking for alternatives that led to the program.

"Pets touch people's lives and hearts in so many ways," says Kramek. "Today, saying good bye can be a time to continue this bond. As long as a pet is comfortable and still enjoys quality of life, pet families have choices and that is what we want to give them."

About Laura Kramek

Kramek is a veterinary hospice nurse and licensed veterinary technician (LVT) with a special interest in geriatric pets, pet hospice and end-of-life care. She works closely with pet families to help them know all of their options. Kramek has been with The Cat Practice since 1993 and is a graduate of Michigan State University. She and her husband live in Dearborn Heights with their two cats Epoisses and Pinot.



Kramek

About Camille Greenwald, PhD.

Dr. Greenwald is a licensed clinical psychologist. She has been in private practice in Birmingham for 20-plus years, and has served as a consultant at William Beaumont Hospital. She is a graduate of Wayne State University and the University of Detroit and is also a member of the American Psychological Association and the Michigan Psychological Association. Dr. Greenwald, a life-long cat owner, shares her home with her family and three cats: Caspurr, Henry and Bill who is geriatric.

About The Cat Practice

The Cat Practice, Michigan's first cats-only veterinary hospital, opened in 1981. Open seven days a week and evenings, The Cat Practice provides advanced preventative and medical care with an emphasis on early detection to help cats live longer, better and healthier lives. Located at 875 South Worth in Birmingham, Michigan, The Cat Practice cares for feline purebred and mixed breeds from around southeastern Michigan. For information go to www.thecatpracticepc.com or call 248-540-3390.