

Thank Your Vet for a Healthy Pet Regional Winners

CAT FANCY and DOG FANCY are pleased to announce the regional finalists in the 2009 Thank Your Vet for a Healthy Pet contest.

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Amara Estrada, DVM — Southeast finalist
University of Florida Veterinary Medical Center
Gainesville, Fla.
Nominator: Gary Anthon

Our adventure with Dr. Amara Estrada began in the winter of 2007. Our black Labrador Retriever, Scooby, started having fainting spells. Over time, the fainting spells got worse. He started losing weight and would faint a dozen times a day. Scooby had a third-degree heart blockage and needed a pacemaker. If he didn't get one, he would die within weeks. We were devastated. We couldn't even imagine a dog getting a pacemaker.

We hit the Internet and found Dr. Amara Estrada conducting a clinical trial putting pacemakers in dogs to correct third-degree heart blockages. What could be more perfect? We sent her an e-mail, and she immediately responded. But there was a problem: She was in Florida, and we lived 2,000 miles away. But she was willing to try. Now that we know her, we shouldn't have been surprised. Her love for animals seems boundless. She got Scooby into the program. The challenges were not easy. Scooby had to travel to Florida for the operation, recover, then return for checkups. We were unable to stay and then return for the checkups, so Dr. Estrada asked for volunteers to dog-sit Scooby for three months. On March 27, 2007, Scooby received the pacemaker that saved his life.

We couldn't believe how dedicated and giving she was throughout this ordeal. Scooby returned home that June — cured. We can't imagine what that spring would have been like watching Scooby die. Thanks to Dr. Estrada, Scooby is now running around like before. In your life you hope to meet extraordinary people like Dr. Estrada. We now consider her our friend, and we know she is deserving of this award. Not just for what she did for Scooby, but for what she does every day. She is our hero.

Patrick Hourigan, DVM — Midwest finalist
Richmond Veterinary Clinic
Richmond, Ill.
Nominator: Mary Sue Katzenmayer

I call him "Dr. Wonderful." It aggravates him a little, embarrasses him a lot, but it's true. His real name is Dr. Patrick Hourigan of Richmond Veterinary Clinic in northern Illinois.

Dr. Hourigan graduated from the University of Illinois Veterinary Medical School and has been practicing for 25 years. He is also an aviary veterinarian as well as a certified veterinary acupuncturist. Those are just his "stats." What he really is is wonderful.

He loves what he does, and it shows. Animals are his life and his world. Dr. Hourigan has a calm, caring manner to which all of his patients respond. He advocates first and foremost for pets, sometimes forced to tell people things they don't want to hear, but always with care and compassion. In these tough economic times, he goes the extra mile to work with clients facing tough financial choices with their pets.

In his spare time, Dr. Hourigan helps Fellow Mortals, a wildlife rehabilitation facility in Wisconsin. Dedicated to all creatures great and small, he has performed acupuncture on a screech owl, set a robin's leg, even extracted bullets from a goose. Not long ago, a peacock was hit on the highway near his clinic. It was brought in, and he fixed it. He has put pins in the mangled leg of a woodchuck. His skills are truly amazing. No situation seems to stress him. He just calmly goes about improving the animal's condition any way that he can.

Dr. Hourigan is able to give his patients the very best of both worlds: traditional Eastern and also modern Western medicine. Wrap this up in a loving, compassionate professional and you have the greatest vet. Sorry, doc, but to me and my pets you will always be Dr. Wonderful.

J. Robert Yack, DVM —West finalist
Jackson Creek Veterinary Clinic
Jackson, Calif.
Nominators: Lee and Sandra Wise

It was after midnight. Our 15-year-old Australian Cattle Dog, Deja Blue, was having another violent seizure. We could not wait another second. We called Dr. Bob. He met us at his clinic and put her to rest.

Later, he wrote, "We have known each other a long time and have been through a lot. I know of no better home full of love. Our biggest responsibility is when to take them away from their pain. I thank you for calling me to help you and Deja at a very difficult time."

He thanked us, but it is Dr. Bob who deserves the thanks. Dr. Bob Yack, a certified orthopedic surgeon, owns Jackson Creek Veterinary Clinic. This was not the first time he came to the rescue, and we know we can count on him in the future.

Dr. Bob deserves thanks for many things: For aiding the county's animal control agency and the local humane society with spaying/neutering, vaccinations and an adopt-a-cat display For serving the community by offering low-cost clinics, the use of his facilities for training and puppy socialization classes and a lost-and found bulletin board For supporting the local AKC club activities including microchip clinics and educational booths at their matches For assembling a wonderful staff and a great group of vets that reflect his philosophy of humane animal treatment and for encouraging them to pursue advanced specialties For maintaining a modern, full-service veterinary hospital with 24/7 emergency service

But most of all, we thank him for the patience and empathy he shows us, for the loving care he gives our doggie children and for going that extra mile. We thank you, Dr. Bob, for being our vet.

Kristin Quisenberry, DVM — Northeast finalist
Hidden Valley Animal Clinic
McMurray, Pa.
Nominator: Kathleen Supan

I first met Kristin Quisenberry, DVM, from Hidden Valley Animal Clinic a year ago this June. My 10-year-old Golden Retriever, Elsa, had not been feeling well for a few months. After doing some tests on her, we found that she had a tumor on her spleen. We had been going to Hidden Valley for several years. The staff and doctors have all been great. Most of the time we had seen Dr. Wickerham. It was she that I had talked to about my Elsa's condition. She told me that Elsa should have surgery as soon as possible, but she was not at the clinic that day. She called in the office and spoke to Dr. Quisenberry about Elsa. The office called me and said that she was going to work through her lunch hour to do Elsa's surgery. I was a little hesitant, since I really did not know her that well. But I trusted that Elsa would be in good hands. The surgery went well, but the tumor was very large. It could have ruptured at any time. When we went back to see Elsa after the surgery, Dr. Quisenberry was there to answer all of our questions and was so comforting to us.

I have seen a lot of veterinarians over the years, but I have never felt such care and sincerity than I did from Dr. Quisenberry.

When the biopsy results came back, it was not good news. It was cancer — hemangiosarcoma. She explained that Elsa would probably only live about 3 to 6 months. She gave us the name of a veterinarian who did chemotherapy if we wanted to talk with him. We did make an appointment with him, but it would only give us 1 or 2 months more with her. We decided not to put her through any more. We wanted to make the most of the time we had left with her, which is what we did. She had a great summer and fall.

But in mid-November, Elsa started to show symptoms that she was not feeling well. I called and talked to Dr. Quisenberry and she explained to me what was probably happening with Elsa. We put her on some medicine to help her. Dr. Quisenberry knew how much I loved Elsa and that I did not want her to suffer. I think that is why while talking about what to do when the end was near, she said call me, and she gave me her cell phone number. We spoke many times in the days to follow. Talking about what Elsa ate for dinner and how she was breathing.

On Thanksgiving morning, I had to make the call I hoped I never would. I felt so bad calling her on Thanksgiving Day, but without hesitation she told us to meet her at the clinic. She was very patient with us as we had to say goodbye to our Elsa. I have never felt so much compassion from a veterinarian in my life.

In December, the Saturday before Christmas, through a miracle from our Elsa, we found a Golden Retriever at an animal shelter that desperately needed a home. On our visit to Dr. Quisenberry to have him checked before taking him home we found that she had met Hank before. She also helps at the shelter and she had neutered him.

Over the past months, I have met many other people that have experienced the same kind of care from her. Dr. Quisenberry is not just another veterinarian. She makes a difference in pet owners' lives.