



Photos by Glenn Asakawa | The Denver Post

Otis, a greyhound, gets an animal "PowerBar" from Kim Cook after donating blood at the Wheat Ridge Animal Hospital last week. As with their human counterparts, animals who have just donated blood are given a treat to replenish their strength. Wheat Ridge is one of the few clinics that take blood donations year-round. Ardith Mininger, who owns Otis, brings him in regularly for blood donations.

Doggie donors

Canines give blood at animal hospitals, veterinary blood banks around Denver

By Kieran Nicholson
Denver Post Staff Writer

Wheat Ridge — Otis, an 85-pound greyhound, lay calmly as a nurse tapped his jugular vein with a syringe.

It was routine for the canine blood donor. Just like humans, dogs can find themselves in need of blood because of anemia, illness or injury, said Kim Cook, coordinator with the Denver Veterinary Blood Bank.

During a recent donation, Otis remained still, basking in the attention he received.

"This is partly why we use greyhounds: They are pretty laid-back," said Debbie Young, kennel manager at the Wheat Ridge Animal Hospital.

The blood bank, which operates at the hospital, has about 120 donors. But officials would like a list of about 150 donors to stay on top of growing demands.

"I don't think we could ever have too many," Cook said.

The Deer Creek Animal Hospital in south Jefferson County also has a donor program but on a much smaller scale. Deer Creek looks for about three donors a month to keep four units (pints) of blood on hand, just enough to use without having to go to an outside source, said Misty Fox, a veterinary technician. Blood lasts about 45 days when refrigerated.

Recent transfusions at Deer Creek have included a dog that had its spleen removed and a dog fighting an autoimmune disease.

"Without the blood, they wouldn't make it," Fox said.

The Colorado State University School of Veterinary Medicine has a donor program with more than 100 dogs, said Maura Green, head nurse for medicine. The Fort Collins school uses about 500 units a year, but it doesn't sell any.

"We can't afford to sell it; we need it," Green said.

The Denver Veterinary Blood Bank typically sells 25 to 30 units a month.

A couple of years ago, Otis was among a small group of greyhounds the hospital kept on site to rotate as blood donors. He was first brought to the hospital through Greyhound Rescue, a group that finds homes for retired racing grey-



hounds.

Now, he returns to continue giving. "He doesn't seem to mind at all," said Ardith Mininger of Greeley, who owns Otis.

After donating about a pint of blood during a 10-minute procedure — about 20 minutes counting prep work — Otis wagged his tail and snarfed down a doggie "PowerBar."

To be eligible, donor dogs must be between the ages of 1 and 7, be healthy and weigh over 50 pounds. It's easier for staff to find veins in bigger dogs, Cook said, and they have higher volumes of blood, generally making the procedure safer. Donors, who can participate every three months, should have a friendly disposition.

"We feel like he is definitely providing for a good cause," Mininger said of Otis. "We are animal lovers, and it's a way for us to help other animals."

Staff writer Kieran Nicholson can be reached at 303-820-1822 or knicholson@denverpost.com.



Above, Debbie Young and other staff at Wheat Ridge Animal Hospital comfort Otis after he donated about a pint of blood, top.

How to donate

Owners interested in volunteering their large dogs can call the Denver Veterinary Blood Bank at 303-424-3325, or go to www.wrah.com.