

Doggy donors let blood flow

By Rebecca Jones

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

WHEAT RIDGE — Civic-minded pets and their equally civic-minded owners have a chance to literally give a little of themselves to help others in need this Friday.

The Wheat Ridge Animal Hospital — which operates the only 24-hour animal blood bank in the metro area — will host a first-ever joint human/animal blood drive. While the humans are offering up a pint on the Bonfils Blood Center bus, their pets can go inside to have their blood typed and screened and can also sign up to become volunteer blood donors.

"It only takes about 15 minutes," says Kim Cook, who runs the animal blood bank.

Dogs who sign up to be blood donors get quite a few benefits, she says. In addition to the free blood-typing, they get a physical exam before each donation, a 10 percent discount on all medical services, a free annual wellness exam and vaccinations, free annual blood work, a free annual heartworm test and a free nail trim with each donation, as well as free blood products, should the dog ever be in need. Those benefits can total up to several hundred dollars' worth of services a year. In exchange, owners agree to bring their dogs in a minimum of four times a year to donate blood, though some agree to be on emergency call lists and come in more often.

"The actual donation only takes 5 to 7 minutes," says Cook. "We take a pint. We use the same equipment as with humans. The only difference is where we take the blood. Instead of from their arm, we take it from the dog's jugular vein, on the side of the neck."

She assures concerned owners that it's no more painful than the human experience of giving blood. "It's just a little pinch," she says. "Rarely do they even flinch."



Big Mac, a St. Bernard, donates blood at Wheat Ridge Animal Hospital. Kelly Cuttitta, left, and Suzie Friedman comfort him.

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The criteria

Qualifications for canine blood donors:

- 1 to 8 years of age
- Over 50 pounds
- Agree to donate a minimum of four times a year

Madeleine, a 7-year-old retired racing greyhound, is one of the regulars at the blood bank. "She's been doing it two or three years," says her owner, Marianne McKiernan, of Denver. "We've been lucky because we've never had a dog face a crisis. But others aren't so lucky. And this is an easy thing for us to do."

McKiernan drops off Madeleine first thing in the morning and makes plans to pick her up later that afternoon. "We'll give her the dog equivalent of cookies and orange juice when she gets home," she says. "Greyhounds are like orchids. They need soft places to lie and lots of attention, and I know she gets that while she's here."

Greyhounds are among the favored breeds when it comes to canine blood donors. Their easy demeanor and short hair make drawing blood a snap. And 95 percent of them have A- blood, the universal blood type for dogs. Cook notes that there are about a dozen subtypes of canine blood but two main types for transfusion purposes: A+ and A-. About 60 percent of dogs have A+

blood.

At present, the hospital has a list of 100 or so volunteer canine blood donors but would like to have at least 50 more. In addition, a crew of five greyhounds and six cats live at the hospital to serve as more regular donors.

Since it's substantially harder to collect cat blood — the donor cats nearly always need to be anesthetized — the hospital doesn't have any volunteer donor cats. But the kitties, who come from Table Mountain Animal Shelter, remain in the in-house blood-donor corps for just a year and then are placed in adoptive homes, Cook says.

Angus, a 3-year-old German shepherd, arrives at the hospital to make his quarterly donation. Angus' owner, Travis Otto, of Lakewood, said signing up Angus to be a blood donor was his wife's idea. "She's a dog trainer, and she knew dogs need blood, too," he says.

Otto has no fear for Angus' safety while he's giving blood. Complications from donating are extremely rare. He'll be back to collect his dog later in the afternoon and then plans a special evening for the dog. "We'll give him rest, relaxation, some TLC," Otto says.

The Wheat Ridge Animal Hospital Blood Drive runs from 2 to 3:10 p.m. and 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. Friday. The hospital is at 3695 Kipling St., Wheat Ridge. For information or to schedule an appointment, call Jamie Petsitis, 303-424-3325, ext. 157.