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A New Way To Care

By Mark Mitchell

Bob Dylan made famous the phrase The Times They Are A-Changin', and although its doubtful he was alluding to the world of holistic medicine, the phrase still rings true during a time in which the Western portion of the world continues to adopt more and more of the medical beliefs that their Eastern neighbors have used for hundreds and thousands of years.

Men and women across America have begun exploring the world of herbs, homeopathic remedies, acupuncture and chiropractic care as they supplement the care and treatments offered by conventional medicine.

A growing, but relatively new phenomenon in this philosophy has arisen in the form holistic animal healing. With more and more people looking for alternative methods of nutrition and healing, it only stands to reason that these same people would explore similar avenues for their loving pets.

Dr. Maggie Federhart was one of these inquisitive souls before she went back to school, and subsequently, opened the doors to Whispering Waters Animal Clinic. Federhart's clinic offers clientele in the high country the options of acupuncture or homeopathy, to name a few, along with conventional medicine, which she also administers.

"Holistic animal healing takes into account the whole animal, restoring balance both physically and mentally," said Federhart. "The emotional state of your pet is just as important as the physical, because mental symptoms often lead to physical problems."

Federhart, who graduated from the University of Florida in 1988 with a degree in veterinary medicine, began her alternative path in 1995 when she began taking classes in acupuncture, homeopathy and chiropractic care.

Classes were five days a week for six weeks, and were held in Texas, Illinois and Durham, NC. Once completed, Federhart opened the Whispering Waters Animal Clinic in Blowing Rock in 1997. From the beginning, Federhart has always made house calls a part of her practice.

"I always felt traditional vets were limited in how much they could do for a pet," Federhart said. "In holistic medicine, there is always a path of care. I guess the best way to put it is, a holistic approach gives you more tools in a toolbox."

Federhart said she has encountered many confirmations of this belief, where pet owners, after unsuccessful trips to a conventional vet, have found a solution in alternative methods.



Owner Ann Matthews loves on her 3 1/2-month-old puppy Luke as receives an acupuncture treatment, see the needle on the center of his head, on Aug. 30.
Photo by Mark Mitchell

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"I've treated dogs with back or neck problems, who cortisone did not help or for who surgery was not an option, come in for acupuncture treatments and, after a couple of sessions, watch them race around their home or my office."

Federhart also recalls another instance in which her cat's best friend had died. Afterwards, her cat stopped eating and stopped efficiently using her back legs. After conventional blood work and other tests were conducted, antibiotics were administered, but to no avail. During this time, her cat went from a weight of 13 pounds to that of eight pounds. Federhart then sought the advice of an alternative-based individual who suggested a natural remedy of natrum muraticum. By the following morning, her cat had begun eating and using her back legs normally, and never looked back.

Not only can holistic approaches work when conventional methods fail, but holistic medicine uses a different philosophy, according to Federhart. In addition to acupuncture, chiropractic and homeopathy methods, holistic methods use other modalities such as herbs, flower essences, nutrition, vitamins, minerals and supplements to treat animals. All holistic protocols used in humans are also used in animals.

"All of these modalities can cure an animal, not just mask the problem," Federhart remarked. "Instead of giving a cortisone shot to a dog to relieve the pain, a holistic vet would cure the source of the pain. That's the different philosophy."

While a proponent of alternative medicine for animals, Federhart also believes in the two forms of treatment working hand in hand.

"I still incorporate x-rays and conventional medications," Federhart adds, "I just offer a different avenue as well. The biggest misconception about holistic medicine versus conventional is that it is an either/or proposition. It's not. You can do both at the same time."

Federhart's business path saw her close her Blowing Rock clinic in 2001, only to reopen at her current location along North Pine Run Road in Boone. House calls are still available, and office visits are by appointment only.

Her office is affectionately called Tabbytown, because clients will be greeted by ... four tabby cats, but the official business name remains as Whispering Waters Animal Clinic.

Federhart is the only holistic veterinarian in the immediate area, but she hopes for growth in the world of alternative vets.



Dr. Maggie Federhart prepares to give Luke a treat during his visit to her office in Boone. Photo by Mark Mitchell

"There are 50,000 vets in the country, but only 800 holistic vets," said Federhart. "However, there is progress being made in this area. Conventional schools are now offering holistic courses to their students. I know that North Carolina State, the University of Florida and Colorado State are currently doing this."

To help spread the word of holistic animal healing, Federhart is conducting the first in a series of seminars and workshops designed to teach guardians and caretakers natural health care for their animal family members.

The Animals ... Naturally seminar will be held at the Green Park Inn in Blowing Rock on Oct. 1. The program will be from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., with a cost of \$75. Workbooks will be distributed to those attending, and interested individuals can call 828-264-8077 to reserve their spot. Federhart also plans to have her new website, www.animalsnaturally.org up and running by this date.

The area's only holistic vet said she hopes the study, and incorporation, of holistic medicine continues to grow in the future.

"I want to have senior college students come to study with me and do preceptorships in holistic medicine," Federhart said. "I also hope more and more conventional vets become involved in alternative methods, because there are not of us out there."



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