



PROFILE

Priceless pets:

Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson provides care around the clock



A cat named Nadina rests in the cages at Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson.

By Martha Lundin, *Inside Tucson Business*

Does your dog need a knee replacement? Does your cat need chemotherapy? Is it after midnight when your pet eats something it shouldn't? Knowing your pet can get emergency and critical-level care around the clock can bring a lot of comfort to a pet owner. The Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson, 4909 N. La Canada Drive, offers specialty, emergency and critical veterinary care to furry family members 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Started by veterinarians Barbara Gores and James Boulay, the Veterinary Specialty Center provides a wide range of care in addition to emergency services, including orthopedic surgery, general surgery, plastic and reconstructive surgery, internal medicine, oncology, neurology and neurosurgery, and dermatology services for pets.

But Boulay and Gores are careful to point out that the services they provide are a complement to regular veterinary services.

"Our philosophy is that we view ourselves as an extension of the general practice veterinarians," Gores said. "We don't compete with them. We have a commitment to working as a team with them."

"Our idea was to build a place to practice with different specialists," Boulay added.

The 10,000 square foot facility houses three surgical suites, seven exam rooms, dental and outpatient treatment areas, and many of the same

pieces of equipment that would be found in a regular human hospital or specialty clinic, including a spiral CT scanner, ultrasound and endoscopy equipment.

The veterinary center, which handles about 14,600 cases per year, usually has 25-35 inpatients at any given time. In the eighteen months since it opened, the center has grown to about 80 employees, including 14 veterinarians who are on staff or on call. The center also boasts the only board certified veterinary neurologist and the only board certified veterinary criticalist in Tucson.

Given the range of specialty care, the veterinary center draws patients from all over the country.

"We treat a lot of animals from a lot of different states, especially with the snowbird population we have here," Boulay said.

To keep communications going between all concerned parties, the veterinarians perform rounds on all the inpatient animals twice a day and telephone and written reports are provided to the pet's regular veterinarian and family.

Boulay said that people are surprised to find that a veterinary hospital is similar in many ways to a "people" hospital.

"Cages versus beds — it's really no different. The equipment, medicine and treatment modalities are pretty much the same," he said.

People are spending more money on pets than ever before. A recently completed study projected that Americans will have spent \$34.9 billion

on their pets in 2005. In 2004, Americans spent \$34.4 billion on their pets: \$14.2 billion on food, \$8.2 billion on veterinary care, \$8.1 billion on pet supplies and over the counter medicine, \$1.6 billion on live animal purchases, and \$2.3 billion on pet services such as grooming and boarding.

For busy veterinarians who are seeing patients, running a veterinary center takes more than just someone to care for the animals. To oversee the business end of the center, Boulay and Gores hired Jan Woods as hospital administrator.

"One of the more important people in the business is Jan. We need to run a good business, because this is a business," Boulay said.

Woods, who spent 30 years working for hospitals on the human side, said she sees some similarities in the way veterinarians and pediatricians practice.

"One really interesting thing is that veterinary specialists remind me of pediatricians because they have to get a medical history from someone other than the patient," Woods said, "and they must also be intuitive because the patients can't talk to them."

Dr. Gores sees it a little differently. "I equate veterinary specialists more to plastic surgeons because people spend their own hard-earned dollars on pet care," she said.

With pet owners often paying for much of the treatment out of their own pockets, the doctors are aware of the need to talk about all the possible options and the associated costs.





Veterinary technicians Jackie Gendreau, left, and Molly Stone, move Hambone outside to get some fresh air.



Dr. Barbara Gores, one of the founding members of the center.

Woods said that going over treatment options with pet owners is an important part of service provided. "We can offer the full range of treatments, but it's a decision that the owner makes with the surgeon. Often, they want more than they can afford, especially in an emergency situation," Woods noted.

Gores and Boulay aren't finished with their plans for a state-of-the-art veterinary medicine center in Tucson. They are planning to set up a pet rehabilitation center that would offer physical rehabilitation therapy and exercise opportunities for dogs, and might also serve as a setting for national agility trials.

Boulay said people are willing to spend a lot of money on their pets because of their intense emotional attachment. He recalled a man who spent over \$7,000 on a kidney transplant for his cat.

"I asked him, how do you justify spending that amount of money on your pet? He said, 'I am trading

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Biz Facts:

Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson Services: Specialty, critical and emergency veterinary care

Address: 4909 N. La Canada Drive

Telephone: (520) 795-9955

Website: www.vetspecialtytucson.com

Founded: 2004

Founders: Dr. James Boulay and Dr. Barbara Gores

Hours: Appointments: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday

Emergency care: 24 hours a day, 365 days a year

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money for the life of my cat. I can get more money. I'm glad to give money for the life of my cat. My cat is priceless."

Contact Martha Lundin at mlundin@azbiz.com or call (520) 295-4259.



Dr. James Boulay, another founding member of the center.

