



# Animal Connection

Oregon State University College of Veterinary Medicine

SPRING 2013

## Mini Horse Saved By Early Detection

When Danny walks up to the entrance at the Providence Child Center in Portland, Oregon, he knows how to step on the rubber mat to open the automatic doors. That wouldn't be remarkable, except Danny is a horse; a 245-pound, 33-inch miniature horse with a ton of personality.

Danny became a registered Pet Partner after he and his owner, Chris Noble, completed weeks of training to learn skills needed to visit hospitals, care homes, and other facilities where people can benefit from animal therapy. Working electric doors isn't the only thing Danny learned: he rides in elevators and isn't spooked by strange medical gizmos. These skills turned out to be handy when Danny recently confronted his own medical challenges.

Noble purchased Danny from a show barn as a neglected nine-year old, but his natural abilities soon became apparent. "He loves people and attention," she says. "He is smart, loving, and spunky." One of his favorite activities has been visiting the activity center at Providence

Elder Place, because most of the residents there are seated and he is able to connect with them face-to-face. "His size made it easy for them to pet and talk to him," says Noble. "Many folks had great horse stories to share with me, and others just liked to look at him or take pictures."

With his barn mate, Pepper, Danny also learned to pull a cart and for many years participated in 4-H driving classes.

But last year, Danny's active social life was put on hold when he became seriously ill with liver disease. "We think he was poisoned by something out in a new pasture -- maybe creeping buttercup or possibly tansy," says Noble.

Danny's vet treated him with medication and a high-sugar diet and he improved. Follow-up tests found no liver damage, and Noble thought he might be able to resume some of his favorite activities.

But the ordeal left Danny with chronic colic, and after several worrisome episodes, Noble's vet referred her to the OSU Veterinary

Teaching Hospital. There, Dr. John Schlipf noticed Danny was very sore on his feet, shifting his weight frequently and struggling to get up and down. He suspected laminitis.

Laminitis is a very painful condition caused by degeneration of the 'shock absorbers' (laminae) that protect the weight-bearing bones in a horse's

Continued on page 7



A bout of colic brought Danny to the OSU Veterinary Hospital where veterinarians discovered laminitis in his hooves.

# Kind Citizens Rescue Disabled Veteran's Dog

Chris is a veteran of the Gulf War who lives in a converted bus in southern Oregon with her assistance dog, Merlin. She got Merlin from a non-profit organization where he was specially trained to retrieve her inhalers when she is suffering from a debilitating asthma attack. Many Gulf War veterans attribute their post-service asthma to the hundreds of oil well fires that blackened the skies of Kuwait in the early 1990s. Chris also suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Merlin is her only close companion.

Last year, Merlin developed *Aspergillus*, a fungal infection in his nose and sinuses. Merlin's veterinarian treated him by flushing his sinuses with an anti-fungal but the infection proved stubborn and repeat treatments were needed. Then Chris went in for surgery and developed a serious bone infection that kept her in the hospital longer than planned. Worried about her dog and with no one to turn to, she called a former neighbor, Kim Haines, and asked her to check on Merlin.

Kim Haines is one of those warm, friendly people that you like immediately. When she checked on Merlin, he was so happy to see her, she decided to take him home until Chris could be released. She also administered his fungal medication and kept his next appointment with Southern Oregon Veterinary Specialists. There she received some bad news: Merlin's veterinarian was concerned that the treatments might be causing sinus damage that could eventually compromise his brain. She suggested Merlin go to the Veterinary Teaching Hospital at OSU for a CT scan.

With an unreliable car and not much money to spare, Kim was determined

to find a way to help Merlin. When others suggested she euthanize him, Kim said, "No way. I know he is just one dog but he's really important to me and I will not have him put down. Chris will need him."

So Kim contacted Pets of the Homeless, a non-profit organization that provides veterinary care to the homeless. They helped her find the Tails of Hope Foundation who provided half the cost of the CT scan. The OSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital agreed to provide the remaining money through their Olive Britt Fund.

Next, Kim had to find a way to get Merlin to Corvallis, 300 miles from her home in Brookings. Another big-hearted person, Kim's friend Jennifer Ralston, agreed to drive them to OSU. With the dog and a car full of kids, they made the long trek north.

Merlin's veterinarian made a good call: his CT scan did reveal bone damage in

Merlin's sinuses. "It was very obvious to see the voids in the skull," says Kim. Dr. Jana Gordon also advised that he have the fungus scraped out and the holes in his skull repaired. In the meantime, Merlin is on a regime of anti-fungal pills which take longer to be effective, but won't harm his brain. "It will be a long process and probably costly but I am doing what I can to find funding to help pay for his treatment," says Kim.

Chris has had a long recovery but is expected to leave the hospital soon. Thanks to Kim Haines, she will come home to her best friend. "I let her know Merlin is being cared for by some wonderful people who care equally for her," says Kim. "A disabled U.S. veteran and her loyal companion should never feel unloved!"

*If you would like to donate to Merlin's care through the OSU Olive Britt Fund, contact Tiffany Pollard at 1-800-354-7281.*



Merlin, an assistance dog for a disabled Gulf War veteran, gets a CT scan at the OSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital.





# From Horses To Humans

**An equine surgical procedure is now helping people.**

**J**ohnny Cash is a gentle giant. He doesn't play the guitar (not yet, anyway) but he is a favorite with the kids taking Hunter-Jumper classes at Quiet Rein Riding School in Portland.

You would think a 1,400 pound Thoroughbred/Shire cross might scare a child just learning to ride, but he's so sweet-tempered that trainer Jill McGrady uses him as a demonstration horse in her beginning classes. "He's a dreamboat," says owner Jill Taylor. "Not spooky and very safe." Cash is also a bit of a character and has learned to zip and unzip people's jackets with his mouth.

Last year, Taylor began to notice some 'funny' in his hind end but it didn't affect his gait or enthusiasm for events. "He always went great," she says. However, when a potential

new owner put him through his paces and then conducted a neurological exam, he reacted by nearly falling down.

Taylor took Cash to OSU Veterinary Hospital where Dr. John Schlipf did a complete neurological work up. Although he only rated a 1+ on a neurological scale where 5 is the worst, radiographs and a myelogram revealed compression of two vertebral joints in his lower neck. Schlipf thought Cash was a good candidate for Spinal Basket Surgery and explained the procedure to Taylor, who agreed.

The history of Spinal Basket Surgery begins with a famous horse and, remarkably, ends with human medicine. Several decades ago Dr. George Bagby, an orthopaedic surgeon from Spokane, Washington invented "Bagby's Basket," a small,

hollow metal cylinder with perforated walls. He designed it to restore lost disc height resulting from a collapsed disc. When the basket, packed with bone graft, is inserted into the space between two vertebrae, the graft begins to grow through the perforated walls eventually forming a solid bond that holds the vertebrae in position.

The surgery became well-known in the horse community when Bagby and Dr. Barrie Grant, an equine surgeon at Washington State University, performed the surgery on Seattle Slew, who was diagnosed with "Wobbler's Syndrome," a degenerative condition causing serious neck instability. The doctors implanted the metal basket into Seattle Slew's spine, successfully relieving his pain and saving him from certain death.

Continued on page 7

# Sparky gets A Life

A bald eagle's surprising journey from near death to school mascot.



Sparky was born and raised near Albany, Oregon. As a juvenile bald eagle, he lived with his parents on the Willamette River. Sparky was born with stunted feather growth and could not fly, so his future as an independent adult looked bleak.

In 2004, a hiker unintentionally spooked Sparky causing him to fall into the river. Oddly enough, this turned out to be a good thing because the hiker dove in, saved Sparky, and took him to the Chintimini Wildlife Center (CWC) near Corvallis.

When Sparky arrived at CWC, he was emaciated and very frightened; center volunteers carefully nursed him back to health. Although CWC rehabilitates injured and sick birds with the goal of releasing them back into the wild, Sparky was not releasable so he became a candidate for the center's education program. Kris Downing, Education Bird Program Director, started working with him on a daily basis to accustom him to being around people. She began by just hanging out with him in his aviary. Eventually he learned to walk up her arm to get food. "Sparky was a willing candidate since he never really got a chance to be wild," she says. "It took a lot of time and patience but it was worth it." Now he takes most of his food from her hands. "With his big beak, he is really very gentle," she says.

Sparky never did learn to hunt. The CWC tried tempting him with live mice but the big bird was afraid of them. "It took him a long time to learn to catch a goldfish in his pool," says Downing.

In 2005, Sparky was adopted by Mountain View elementary school as their mascot. Soon after, Mrs. Tubbs' third-grade class visited Sparky to learn about





Students in Mrs. Tubb's third grade class at Mountain View Elementary School wrote and published a book about Sparky.

eagles and the other wild critters saved by the CWC. Then they went back to school and devised a project to help: They applied for and won a grant to publish 'Sparky's Story', a book written and illustrated by the students. Copies of the book are for sale in the Mountain View Elementary School office for \$10, and all proceeds go to support Sparky and other wildlife at CWC.

Last year, Sparky faced another big challenge in his unusual life: he was diagnosed with skin cancer. It originated in his feather follicle and grew quickly into a large tumor surrounding one feather. It made him uncomfortable and prevented him from folding his wing properly.

Although they typically only operate on cats and dogs, the small animal surgeons at OSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital volunteered to remove Spark's tumor. It was a delicate surgery that required entirely removing the feather and feather follicle all the way down to the wing bone. "We wanted to be sure to get all of it," says Dr. Milan Milovancev.

The OSU Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory identified the tumor as dermal squamous cell carcinoma, a form of skin cancer. Little is known

about the avian form of this cancer but Milovancev says it is considered locally aggressive in dogs. However, he thinks Sparky's prognosis is good. "It grows fast locally, but usually does not metastasize. In dogs, if you remove the tumor entirely, it is usually curative."

Now recovering in his aviary at CWC, Downing and her staff will regularly check Sparky's wings for signs of the cancer returning. Meanwhile, he is doing great. "I have never seen him eat

as much as he did after the surgery," says Downing. "He is a pretty happy eagle anyway, and now to see him healthy again makes me happy. I can't begin to tell how grateful I am for OSU's role in helping Sparky,"

*Through the Olive Britt charitable fund, the OSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital is able to provide free veterinary care to rescue animals from shelters across Oregon. If you are interested in donating to the fund, contact the OSU Foundation: 1-800-354-7281.*



The surgical team at the OSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital prepare Sparky's wing for surgery.



# Dainty Dog Finds Forever Family

**After her big heart got a little repair, Lola went home to her new Mom and Dad.**

**L**ola was the runt of the litter. That sounds a bit negative, but when you are an adorable, blonde Chihuahua, being tiny just makes you cuter.

Lola came to the Heartland Human Society in a group of week-old siblings. The policy of Heartland is to spay/neuter all dogs before they are adopted, so the puppies went to foster homes until they were old enough to be sterilized.

Back at Heartland a few months later, most of the puppies found adoptive parents very quickly. A nice, older couple fell in love with Lola and filled out the paperwork to make her a new member of their family. Then they went home and waited for her to be spayed. That's where the happy ending hits a bump in the road.

Lola's pre-spay examination revealed the reason for her tiny size. She had

a continuous heart murmur, and radiographs revealed that the left side of her heart was enlarged due to a congenital defect that caused it to overload with blood. Untreated, it would lead to congestive heart failure, recurrent pneumonia, and a premature death.

Fortunately, Lola's condition was completely curable with a surgical procedure. So Heartland contacted the OSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital to see if there was any money in the Olive Britt Fund to pay for her surgery.

When special animals like Lola and Merlin (see story on page two) come to veterinary hospital at OSU, sometimes their care can be covered or supplemented by the Olive K. Britt Endowment for Emergency Medicine.

Olive Britt was an OSU graduate who went on to become a well-known equine veterinarian in Virginia; her most famous patient was Secretariat who won the Triple Crown in 1973 and set race records

that still stand today. When Britt died in 2006, her will created a fund to provide hospital care for shelter animals and animals whose owners cannot pay for critical treatment.

Many generous donors have added to the Olive Britt Fund over the years, allowing OSU to save hundreds of wonderful animals. Luckily there was money in the fund for Lola and in early January, OSU veterinary surgeon, Dr. Milan Milovancev, repaired her heart.

The surgery went well and the next day Lola's foster mom took her home to recover. "She was prancing around like a little butterfly," says Brittany Gardner, Director of Operations at Heartland. "I could not believe she just had surgery."

By February, Lola was completely healed and able to be spayed. At last, after months of patient waiting, her new Mom and Dad were able to take her home. "They are over-joyed," says Gardner, "They have been waiting so long and are so excited. We can't thank OSU enough."

## Danny Continued from page 1

hoof. It has many possible causes, one being the toxins that develop with liver problems. Left untreated, laminitis can cause permanent lameness and in advanced cases, the horse has to be euthanized.

Dr. Schlipf, and his colleague Dr. Trina Westerman, gave Danny pain killers and prescribed supportive orthotics and corrective hoof trimming to relieve the pressure on the laminae. They also encouraged Noble to give Danny two weeks of stall rest with very soft bedding. Noble took Danny home and began the long process of helping him to recover.

Then, just about the time Danny was back to normal, he became so sick with colic she rushed him back to Corvallis in the middle of the night. By the time they arrived at OSU, Danny was so lethargic he just lay down in his stall. Noble knew he wouldn't like being isolated so she

asked the OSU veterinary technician on duty to replace the solid stall door with a 5-bar gate. She wanted him to be able to look at the horses across the way. "He is such a curious little guy, as bad as he felt, when they installed it he actually got up to look around," says Noble.

Dr. Westerman suspected the colic was caused by ulcers in the gastrointestinal tract, probably a complication of all the medication Danny had taken over the course of a very rough year. She took Danny off all medication, administered IV fluids, and asked the students on clinical rotation to hand feed him a special mash every two hours for several days. Gradually he became healthy again. "He is a survivor," says Noble.

Now on a low-sugar, grass-hay diet including restriction of pasture grazing, Danny is doing well. His ulcers have healed and his hooves are pain-free.

On a recent visit to OSU for a check-up and hoof trimming, Danny poked his head out the window of Noble's pickup truck canopy to greet student Mackenzie Anderson. Prior to his arrival, Anderson prepared a stall just for him by installing a 5-bar gate and sure enough, once in his stall, the first thing he did was stretch his head out to investigate the nearby horses.

A favorite patient at the VTH, when Danny trots out to get his hooves trimmed, students and staff stop to pet him and say hello. He will need a special diet and corrective farrier work indefinitely, but now that he is comfortable on his feet again, Noble is optimistic he may soon return to a limited number of therapy visits. She is grateful to OSU for all the tender, loving care he received throughout his ordeal. "They are so dedicated," says Noble. "You can tell they really care."

## Spine Surgery Continued from page 3

After Seattle Slew's surgery made the news, Dr. Stephen Kuslich, a spine surgeon from Minneapolis, Minnesota converted Dr. Bagby's design into a basket suitable for human use. Dr. Kuslich's device was made of titanium and designed for the posterior lower part of the spine. It quickly caught the attention of his peers, and is now commonly used in human back surgery.

Dr. Grant now has a private practice where he consults exclusively on Wobbler's syndrome and travels all over the country performing Spinal Basket Surgery on horses. The OSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital has brought him to Corvallis several times to operate on horses in their

care. "He has probably done more of this procedure than anyone and has truly perfected the technique," says Schlipf. "Getting the depth and implant placement and alignment correct is critical."

Cash bounced right back from the surgery. "As soon as we got home, he was back to his sassy self," says Taylor. "He is moving around so well, you wouldn't know he had surgery except for his shaved hair."

Dr. Schlipf advised two months of stall rest for Cash. Taylor knows this will be difficult for the big horse so she bought him some Jolly Balls and other toys and is encouraging everyone at Quiet Rein to give him

lots of attention and love. At the end of two months, Taylor will start rehabilitation exercises and hand-walking him.

According to Dr. Schlipf, seventy percent of horses who have undergone Spinal Basket Surgery improve at least one grade on the neurological scale. Since Cash was rated a 1+ before surgery, his chances for a complete recovery are good. "Will he improve enough to go back to his vocation as a jumper? Only time will tell," says Schlipf. "It will be twelve to eighteen months before we know what his final neurological status and function as an athlete will be."



*Animal Connection* is published by the Oregon State University College of Veterinary Medicine: Lyn Smith-Gloria, editor and designer.  
Send feedback to: [cvmnews@oregonstate.edu](mailto:cvmnews@oregonstate.edu)

# ***On the Road Again***

## **OSU Equine Specialists Make House Calls**

### **Mobile Equine Services**

- Preventative medicine
- Dentistry
- Surgical procedures
- Lameness exams
- Endoscopy and Ultrasound
- Shockwave therapy
- Prepurchase exams
- Reproductive services
- Nutritional consultation
- Acupuncture

Available for emergencies 24/7:  
541-737-2858

