Center for Companion Animal Health Opens with Ribbon-Biting Ceremony

When the Duffield family dog, a yellow Labrador retriever named Jessie, bit into a “ribbon” of linked frankfurters to officially open the doors of the Center for Companion Animal Health (CCAH), it wasn’t obvious that this special guest was in remission from cancer.

Jessie was diagnosed with lymphoma in 2000 and underwent treatment at UC Davis. Yet her recovery represents more than a successful course of therapy. Jessie represents the powerful bond that leads animal lovers to seek out the most sophisticated veterinary care available for their pets and support advanced investigations in animal health at the CCAH.

Officials opened the $16 million building July 14 when guests and their pets enjoyed tours of the newest facility of the School of Veterinary Medicine and learned of an advance in feline genetics.

Dean Bennie Osburn told about 200 guests, “It is a major point of pride,” that the Center for Companion Animal Health, constructed entirely with charitable donations, is the largest privately funded facility on the UC Davis campus.

The new center unites existing facilities and expands services. The expansion triples the capacity for oncology patient services, supporting up to 3,600 patients per year with chemotherapy, radiation procedures, immunotherapy and other innovative therapies.

The glass-fronted, two-story structure contains 36,000 square feet of clinical and research space that houses the cancer units, linear accelerator, physical therapy facility and a comfortable reception area for specialty services in ophthalmology, behavior, neurology, cardiology, companion avian/exotic medicine and dermatology. Outside, the Yocha-De-He Memorial Garden honors the ancient bond between dogs and humans, and memorializes beloved companion animals.

Upstairs, laboratories support the investigation of naturally occurring cancers and genetic diseases in small animals. They also play an important role in the school’s mission to teach veterinary students, train specialty residents and mentor graduate researchers.

Several faculty programs are based at the center, including cancer, genetics, infectious disease, nutrition, shelter medicine and behavior.

While veterinarians began seeing patients at the center in May, officials used the July event to celebrate and thank friends of the school.

After the ribbon biting, Gordon Theilen, a pioneer in veterinary oncology, and CCAH Director Niels Pedersen conducted a more traditional ribbon cutting, complete with a pair of four-foot long scissors. Inside, the business of saving lives continued as clients met with clinicians, and animals received therapy.

FELINE GENETICS

RESEARCH REVEALS GENETIC MUTATION THAT CAUSES KIDNEY DISEASE IN CATS

Geneticist Leslie A. Lyons, whose research program is part of the CCAH, announced last spring a breakthrough in feline genetics. “We have discovered the genetic mutation that causes polycystic kidney disease (PKD) in cats.”

Up to 80 percent of “fancy” cats are susceptible to this serious disease, and PKD is a particular problem in Persians and related breeds, Dr. Lyons said. PKD also occurs in people.

Dr. Lyons has developed a new diagnostic test for PKD. “Now, we can identify cats before the disease occurs—and before breeding. We can slowly eradicate this disease.”

Celebrate at the opening of the new CCAH included Melanie, a cockatoo who resides in the Companion Avian & Exotic Medicine Service to assist in teaching avian behavior and handling.

Left: Clients and canines in the CCAH reception area have arrived for patient therapy.