

America's Best Vets

DOG FANCY announces the regional finalists in the 2009 Thank Your Vet For a Healthy Pet contest.

Kristen Quisenberry, D.V.M.
Northeast Finalist
Hidden Valley Animal Clinic
McMurray, Pa.
Nominated by Kathleen Supan

According to Kathleen Supan, a client at Hidden Valley Animal Clinic in McMurray, Pa., Kristin Quisenberry, D.V.M., is “not just another veterinarian. She makes a difference in pet owners’ lives.” Quisenberry is a veterinarian at Hidden Valley Animal Clinic, as well as a volunteer at the local animal shelter.

Supan first met Quisenberry when Supan’s Golden Retriever Elsa fell ill in June 2008. Elsa had a tumor, and Quisenberry worked through her lunch hour to remove it.

When the results of the biopsy came back, it was discovered that Elsa had hemangiosarcoma, a form of cancer. She was given three to six months to live. Chemotherapy was an option, but Supan and her family decided against it and chose just to let Elsa enjoy her last few months as their beloved pet.

Quisenberry gave Supan her cell phone number and told her to call at any time. “Dr. Quisenberry knew how much I loved Elsa and how I did not want her to suffer,” Supan says.

On Thanksgiving Day 2008, Elsa’s condition worsened. “I felt so bad calling Dr. Quisenberry on Thanksgiving, but without hesitation, she told us to meet her at the clinic,” Supan says. “She was very patient with us as we said goodbye to our Elsa. I have never felt so much compassion from a veterinarian in my life.”

Luckily, this story has a happy ending. Elsa will, of course, be missed, but in December 2008, Supan and her family adopted another Golden Retriever named Hank from the local animal shelter at which Quisenberry volunteers. There’s no doubt she will be treating their new pet.

Amara Estrada, D.V.M.
Southeast Finalist
University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine
Gainesville, Fla.
Nominated by Gary Anthon

When Gary Anthon’s Labrador Retriever Scooby began to have severe fainting spells, it was discovered that Scooby had a third-degree heart blockage and his life was in jeopardy. “We hit the Internet and found Dr. Amara Estrada conducting a clinical trial putting pacemakers in dogs to correct third-degree heart blockages,” writes Anthon of South Jordan, Utah, in his nomination essay. “What could be more perfect?”

Though he was 2,000 miles away, Estrada welcomed Scooby into the trial at the University of Florida. His treatment required an operation, recovery time, and follow-up checkups. This posed a problem for the Anthon’s, but Estrada was determined to help. “We were unable to stay and then return for the checkup, so Dr. Estrada asked for volunteers to dog-sit Scooby for three months!” Anthon says. Today Scooby is healthy and happy, and Anthon attributes this to Estrada. “Her love for animals seems boundless.”

Indeed, Estrada has made a successful career doing what she loves. “I originally started off thinking that I wanted to go to medical school, but realized that I could have all of the ‘fun’ of medicine and still be cutting edge, in terms of research and clinical trials, by working in academia,” Estrada says.

She has now found a stimulating career that allows her to work in a variety of areas. “I enjoy being able to do so many different things, from clinical practice to clinical research to teaching,” Estrada says. “I never get bored this way!”

One of her more unusual experiences was doing cardiac evaluations at a nearby wildlife reserve. “We had the opportunity to evaluate zebras, rhinos, and wolves,” she says. “It was wonderful.”

When she's not busy at work, three kids, a Golden Retriever, and a polydactyl cat keep her busy at home. And sometimes her work and personal life intertwine. Now friends with the Anthon's, Estrada says she was flattered to find out they had nominated her for the contest and ecstatic to learn that she had placed.

She is also grateful for the Morris Animal Foundation's continued support. The organization gave her the grant for the study that Scooby was a part of. With the success of her studies and her ongoing work, Estrada hopes to find new and effective treatments for her patients.

Patrick Hourigan, D.V.M.
Midwest Finalist
Richmond Veterinary Clinic
Richmond, Ill.
Nominated by Mary Sue Katzenmayer

Many pet owners believe their veterinarian is a remarkable person, but Mary Sue Katzenmayer of Richmond, Ill., takes it a step further, calling her veterinarian, Patrick Hourigan, D.V.M., of the Richmond Veterinary Clinic in Northern Illinois, "Dr. Wonderful."

Hourigan, a graduate of the University of Illinois Veterinary Medical School has been practicing for 25 years. In addition to treating dogs and cats, Hourigan is also an aviary veterinarian and an acupuncturist, combining both Western medicine and complementary treatments.

Away from the office, Hourigan helps Fellow Mortals, a wildlife rehabilitation facility in Lake Geneva, Wis. Katzenmayer herself has watched the veterinarian perform acupuncture on a screech owl, set a robin's leg, and put pins in a woodchuck's injured leg.

Whether he's working with wildlife or domestic pets, Hourigan has a "calm, caring manner to which all of his patients respond," Katzenmayer writes in her nomination essay. "He advocates first and foremost for pets, sometimes forced to tell people things they don't want to hear, but always with care and compassion."

J. Robert Yack, D.V.M.
West Finalist
Jackson Creek Veterinary Clinic
Jackson, Calif.
Nominated by Lee and Sandra Wise

Ask any breeder and they'll tell you that having accessible, reliable veterinary care is an imperative part of their endeavor. Having bred Australian Cattle Dogs for some 25 years, Lee and Sandra Wise couldn't agree more. Their nomination of J. Robert Yack, D.V.M., speaks volumes of his concern for animals and their owners.

The Wises first came in contact with Yack when he took over Jackson Creek Veterinary Clinic about 15 years ago. They have been with him ever since. Yack has since expanded it from a two-veterinarian practice, and it now has a state-of-the-art boarding facility.

"I've brought over 20 animals to him over the years," Lee Wise says. But he doesn't just praise Yack for his experience with his own pets. "I do a lot of rescue work with cats and belong to the humane society. Dr. Bob deserves thanks for aiding the county's animal control agency and the local humane society with spaying, neutering, vaccinations, and an adopt-a-cat display."

Yack also serves the community through low-cost clinics, opening up his facilities for training and puppy socialization classes, and keeping a regular lost-and-found bulletin board in his office. Yack also puts his generosity to work at local American Kennel Club activities by offering microchip clinics and educational booths at their matches.

As someone with a 24/7 emergency service, it's clear Yack and his staff are all about taking care of their clients. "They're the only 24-hour hospital close to where I live. You'll get follow-up calls from him after your dog has been there for procedures. He'll sit down with you and explain the problem, and goes to seminars and classes to learn new techniques," Wise says. "He also has a wonderful staff that has been with him for a long time and thinks very highly of him."

Read about the 2009 national winner in the February 2010 issue of DOG FANCY!



- Read about the 2008 national winner, Rachel S. Boltz -