

Inside Hemopet, a Nonprofit Animal Blood Bank

A Dog World magazine editor takes a look inside Hemopet, the first private nonprofit blood bank for dogs.

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Although Associate Editor Kristopher Wardwell and I intended to visit the Hemopet facility to take pictures for an upcoming Dog World article, we knew our self-assigned business trip would also answer a long-awaited prayer: We really wanted to pet the dogs. The more the better.

Located in a small business district pocketed away in Garden Grove, Calif., the Hemopet facility houses more than 200 rescued racing Greyhounds. Jean Dodds, DVM, a renowned holistic veterinarian, established the center in 1991, pioneering the first private nonprofit national blood-bank program for animals. After donating blood for at least one year, the dogs are put up for adoption. Since the facility opened, the program has placed more than 1,000 Greyhounds in new homes.

When we arrived, Hemopet's Kelley Taylor met us in the cozy lobby and took us to the adoption "get acquainted" room where Greyhounds who have completed their blood-donation period lounge on cushy pillows and await adoption. Out of the 20 or so dogs there, Kelley chose two of the more docile dogs to play with us in a gated area (yes!), and told us about the facility's current move and renovation plans.

From there, we visited the lab where technician Jennifer Zavala processed blood for the donation program. Leslie Grimes, the blood bank director, explained that the blood that Hemopet collects – along with transfusion supplies – goes to more than 2,000 veterinary clinics in the United States and Canada. The average pet owner often doesn't realize that dogs, just like humans, require blood transfusions when undergoing surgery.

Outside the kennel runs, a few post-blood-donating dogs rested in the hallway. Peering through windows at the kennel runs, I faced more than 200 barking, sleeping, tail-wagging canines. Two to a cage, these rescued dogs were paired up to create bonds, companionship, and a sense of security among the dogs. Watching them, I got an inkling of an idea of how much collaboration, organization, and sheer labor the Hemopet facility requires — a notion enforced on the way to the exercise pen outside.

In the hallways, I spotted bulletin boards strewn with pictures of adopted Greyhounds, water jugs filled with Hulk-green liquid (water mixed with natural ingredients such as ginger), and Greyhound facts posted on the walls. These were only some of the random, visible pieces of an enormous, complex organization. Although not taped, tacked on, or hanging from the walls, the spirit and hard work of Hemopet and its employees were unmistakably present.

Yes, we got to pet the dogs. We also got to witness the result of an ambitious and inspiring vision.

Look for Dr. Jean Dodd's "Natural Wellness" column in Dog World, starting in 2008. To learn more about Hemopet, visit www.hemopet.org.