

TVMF P.A.L.S.

GIVE A LOVING ANIMAL THE VETERINARY CARE THEY NEED TO LIVE LONG HEALTHY LIVES

Meals on Wheels and More of Austin Pets Assisting the Lives of Seniors Client Joe and his companion Amber.



Local Veterinarians Volunteer to Help Meals on Wheels and More Clients and Pets

She's my only real company, since I can no longer communicate with my wife,"

said Meals on Wheels and More (MOWAM) client Joe Bachicha about his dog, Amber, who he cradles in his lap as he describes just how much the poodle-Yorkie mix means to him.

In the next room, Bachicha's wife, Margaret, sits in a wheelchair, her memory and her ability to talk wiped away by the ravaging effects of dementia. The Bachichas, who have been married almost 60 years, raised three daughters together and in their younger days used to ride matching his-and-her Harley Davison motorcycles. Now, though, it's rare for the couple to leave the house since Margaret's condition makes it

very difficult to do so. It's no wonder then that the 79-year-old man and the six-year-old dog have bonded. Spend a few minutes around the two, and it's apparent they're wild about one another.

When Amber developed a problem with one of her paws recently, Joe was worried. Fortunately, a new pilot program between Meals on Wheels and More and TVMF provides free veterinary care to some clients of the Pets Assisting the Lives of Seniors (PALS) program. A TVMF representative took Amber to Austin Vet Care, one of several veterinarian clinics participating in the partnership. At the clinic, Jon Brandes, DVM, not only treated Amber's paw, but he also discovered the dog had an ear infection, and he prescribed medications to cure both ailments. In addition, Amber also got all of her vaccinations and a year's supply of flea medication and heartworm prevention. Best of

all, the entire vet visit didn't cost Joe Bachicha a dime.

When asked why Austin Vet Care is involved in the program, Dr. Brandes states that it's because TVMF makes it so easy. "There's no sacrifice on our clinic's part because TVMF pays for everything," Dr. Brandes says. "We're doing the easy part!"

TVMF Director Leah Ann Tibbitts says the decision to partner with MOWAM was an easy one. "Our board of trustees wanted a way to give back to the community and at the same time have a direct impact on animals in Central Texas," Tibbitts says. "This partnership seemed like a natural fit."

A few weeks after the trip to the veterinarian, Amber's paw and ear are back to normal. For that, her owner is very glad. Knowing that acute medical care for his beloved pet is possible brings Joe Bachicha peace of mind. "I don't know what I would do without it," he says, breathing a sigh of relief.



TEXAS
VETERINARY MEDICAL
FOUNDATION



Meals on Wheels and More

The Texas Veterinary Medical Foundation (TVMF) and Meals on Wheels and More (MOWAM) have partnered to provide veterinary care free of charge to clients of the Pets Assisting the Lives of Seniors (P.A.L.S.) program of MOWAM for the purpose of strengthening the human animal bond by ensuring the health and welfare of animals belonging to people who are homebound, elderly, and disabled. For more information on how to donate or become involved with the program, contact Leah Ann at 512.452.4224 or ltibbitts@tvma.org.

David Mouser, DVM and his canine companion at North Austin Animal Hospital



Photo courtesy Zoom Pet Photography

The Beauty of Treating Beauty

When Beauty first came to North Austin Animal Hospital, she didn't quite fit her name. Her feet were so swollen that it hurt her to walk, and she had such horrible bacterial dermatitis that it was painful even to look at her. But each time she came in for a visit with David Mouser, DVM, and his clinic staff, Beauty's beauty, both inner and outer, started shining through. She weighed a little bit more, wagged her tail a little bit more and got a little bit more hair to where she now prances when she walks through the clinic's door. "She's never going to win a beauty contest, but she's beautiful as far as we're concerned," Dr. Mouser said. "Under all the mange, there was a really cool dog. She has become a regular part of our North Austin Animal Hospital family, so when she comes in, we know we've done some good for her. Beauty's special."

Beauty is special in many different ways, but a noteworthy one is that she's a member of the Texas Veterinary Medical Foundation (TVMF) Pets Assisting the Lives of Seniors (PALS) partnership with Meals on Wheels and More of Austin (MOWAM), which provides veterinary care free of charge for pets belonging to people who are homebound, elderly or disabled for the purpose of strengthening the human-animal bond by ensuring the health and welfare of those animals. Through TVMF PALS, Dr. Mouser has been able to establish a good relationship with Beauty's family, who are MOWAM

clients, to where they now know the importance of taking good care of her.

The journey toward making this possible for pets belonging to MOWAM clients across Central Texas began in 2011 when the TVMF board considered forming a partnership with MOWAM and its PALS program. The PALS program already had a mission of providing assistance with food and basic preventative veterinary care for the pets of MOWAM's homebound clients, but while MOWAM had no problems providing enough food for the pets, they didn't always have the funds to provide regular veterinary care. TVMF wanted to have a direct impact on the health and welfare of animals in Texas, and this partnership with MOWAM offered the perfect opportunity to do so. In February 2012, TVMF and MOWAM launched their pilot program, TVMF PALS, in Austin.

The veterinary care and wellness services provided for the PALS clients of MOWAM will ensure that their companion animals live longer, healthier lives. Keeping their pets healthy also should help result in improved health and quality of life for PALS clients. Happiness, companionship and feeling needed all reinforce the human-animal bond, which has the proven human health benefits of longevity, lowered stress and improved immune levels and mental state.

During the planning process, TVMF recruited Texas Veterinary Medical Association (TVMA) veterinarians to partner with the program. With generous donations from Idexx and Merial for supplies, the partner veterinarians only donate their time to the treatment of the TVMF PALS pets. Each pet receives a comprehensive wellness exam,

appropriate lab testing and vaccinations at no cost to the veterinarian or the pet owner. The pet owner also receives a year's supply of Heartgard and Frontline at no charge.

Currently this program is made possible by public donations, product donations from Idexx and Merial, MOWAM transportation volunteers and the time donated by partner veterinarians. TVMF is also seeking grant funding to expand the program to other areas in Texas.

Dr. Mouser, one of the TVMF PALS partner veterinarians, has been the chief of staff at North Austin Animal Hospital since 2008. When he was a junior in high school, he realized that he wanted to do something in medicine. Even though as a kid he never had a pet, he set his sights on veterinary medicine because he thought that would be a perfect fit since he didn't like people. He left his hometown of Midland and moved to College Station to earn his doctor of veterinary medicine, which he obtained in 1978. When he started practicing veterinary medicine, Dr. Mouser soon discovered that he did in fact like people.

"You spend 30 minutes with a client, and they confess to us, cry to us," he said. "That's the cool part about veterinary medicine, knowing the people and being able to help preserve that human-animal bond. To me, that's the most important thing that we do as veterinarians."

When TVMF approached Dr. Mouser about becoming a partner veterinarian for the TVMF PALS program, there was no hesitation. "There is a need there that just can't be filled," he said. "TVMF and MOWAM have the means to get these pets to us, and we want to be the ones to help."

When it comes to the pets belonging to MOWAM clients, Dr. Mouser wants to be their animal advocate. He doesn't care what type of situation the pet owner may be in, whether it is economic- or health-related. "Their pets deserve care too," he said.

Dr. Mouser thinks there is always more that veterinarians can do for their communities and wants veterinarians to remember that they took an oath to be concerned about animal welfare.

"Think about how much of an impact we'd have on our community if every veterinarian gave back," he said. "We, as a profession, could have a major impact on animal welfare."

In his advice for future veterinarians, Dr. Mouser stressed that veterinarians have to make a living but also must be mindful of their responsibilities both in the community and to their patients and that the more you give of yourself, the more you get in return.

"I think that the good feeling you get and the ability to sleep at night is worth more than any money we make and should be the reason we practice," he said. "If you don't get cold chills every once in a while when you've done something that you prayed would work when you didn't think it would and you gave of yourself and you went that extra step and it works and you see

your clients cry because it worked, well, no amount of money can compete with that."

Being a part of the TVMF PALS program has given Dr. Mouser a new appreciation for what the MOWAM volunteers do and has taught him that warm and fuzzies—and people—are important to him.

"I've been doing this for 30-something years, and I know what's important is maintaining the beauty of the relationship between pets and their owners and a love for the way animals give unconditionally," he said. "Pets don't care who you are and what you may or may not have. That's why I give back to my community and sometimes give the farm away. When you have a client come in with their child who has a puppy with Parvo and you know it's going to cost \$1,000, you can't look down at that child's face and say, 'Oh, crap.' So what can you do? You say to the client, 'OK, let's see what we can do.'"

"It takes some giving to make this worthwhile," he continued. "I think it's important for everybody to see the beauty of giving something of yourself. It's the best warm and fuzzy there is."

TVMF PALS patient Beauty, before and after her treatments with Dr. Mouser



A special THANK YOU to all of the veterinarians and corporate partners who give of themselves to the pets of MOWAM clients:

- Ron Stried, DVM, VCA Tanglewood Animal Hospital
- Jon Brandes, DVM, Austin Vet Care Metric
- Nancy Callaway, DVM, Austin Vet Care Central
- Howard Blatt, DVM, Feather and Fur Animal Hospital
- Thomas Palvino, DVM, Austin Vet Hospital
- Lynsey Smith, DVM, Eye Care for Animals
- David Mouser, DVM, North Austin Animal Hospital
- Leanne Parker, DVM, AM/PM Animal Hospital
- Matt Bendall, DVM, Dr. Bendall's Veterinary Housecall Practice
- Everett Seale, Idexx
- Wade Burton, DVM, Merial
- Paul Torp, Antech

If you would like more information on how to become a part of this program, please contact the TVMF office at 512/452-4224 or ltibbitts@tvma.org.

Schneider and Pearl are much more than pets to Meals on Wheels and More client, Donna.

"They're my babies," she says with a smile. The two adorable miniature schnauzers are best friends and the light of Donna's life. All three received a wonderful gift recently due to a new partnership between the P.A.L.S. (Pets Assisting the Lives of Seniors) program at MOWAM and the Texas Veterinary Medical Foundation. The partnership provides more comprehensive vet services than P.A.L.S. has been able to offer in the past, all at no cost to the clients. Schneider and Pearl were seen by Dr. Blatt at Feather and Fur Animal Hospital recently, where they both received physical exams, and complete vaccinations and testing, as well

as a year's supply of flea and heartworm prevention. The program has proven to be a real blessing for clients like Donna, who want the best for their pets, but often find it hard to afford the high costs of veterinary care.

And the benefits go far beyond the vet visit. Although Donna struggles with painful arthritis, she takes her pups out for a short walk three times a day, exercise she says she simply would not get if it weren't for the dogs.

P.A.L.S. is grateful to all of the local veterinarians who have volunteered their time and services.

