

A special advertising section

## K9 VETERANS DAY

## Showing gratitude with some laser therapy

By Jennifer F. Johnson, VMD, CVPP  
For The Education Center

Owni ng a small animal practice brings great joys and great sorrows—as well as an accumulation of grey hair. As many veterinarians will agree, sometimes the joyful days are few and far between. For this reason, my hospital chooses one day in March to be the most joyful day of all: our annual K9 Veterans Day celebration.

The idea of a K9 Veterans Day originated with Joseph Wright, a Vietnam veteran and retired military dog trainer from Florida, who wanted recognition for working dogs of all capacities. Because March 13 is the official birthday of the U.S. Army K9 Corps, he chose the date to honor dogs who serve.

He and his wife worked hard to establish national recognition for K9 Veterans Day. Each year the recognition grows as new states join in.

Our hospital was proud to work with Pennsylvania state legislators to recognize K9 Veterans Day in our commonwealth in 2011 and each year since.

Our hospital this year hosted dogs from all services: police, fire, search and rescue, military, U.S. Customs, Amtrak, Seeing Eye, therapy and assistance. Handlers and their dogs were recognized with citations from state and U.S. representatives.

The public was invited to meet and thank these amazing service dogs. One of our star service dogs was Joie, a beautiful German shepherd who is the constant companion and vital support to a young boy with cerebral palsy from a neonatal ischemic stroke. It was inspiring to see the team work together.

Our hospital grounds house a service dog memorial garden, where each year we honor nominated dogs with an engraved stone. The ceremony is a tearful one, as the bond between service dog handlers and their partners is extraordinary. This year we memorialized Smoky, a small Yorkshire terrier who during World War II was recognized as the very first therapy dog.

Everyone loves to celebrate the work of these brilliant dogs. Two amazing beagles from the U.S. Customs Agricultural Detection Unit demonstrated their talent in finding contraband produce among dozens of suitcases and packages.

Two police K9 teams dazzled the crowd with a demonstration of bomb detection, assailant attack and basic obedience. Handlers and dogs had photos taken in our photo booth, a memento for a great day.

The best part of the day is giving back to the dogs and handlers. Our staff provides pampering to both handlers and their dogs. Muscle and osteoarthritis injury and pain are all too common in working dogs and their handlers. Our deep tissue therapy laser works overtime on K9 Veterans Day. We provide free laser therapy to every service dog, working out any discomfort and treating any injury.

We also have a certified pet massage therapist creating canine smiles. This year we were happy to team

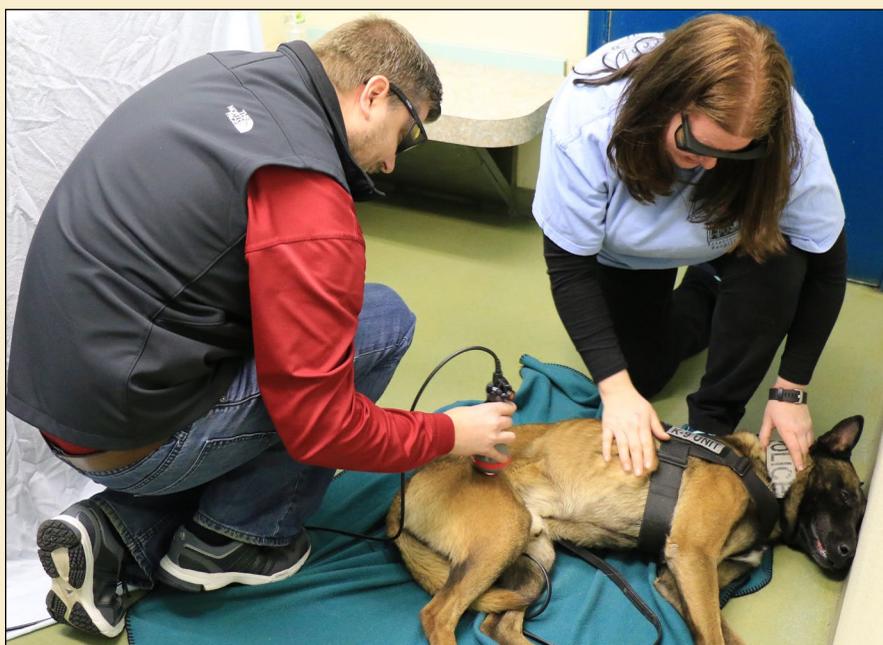
with a human chiropractic team that used a comparable deep tissue laser to donate treatments to the handlers. Everyone was able to experience the benefit of laser therapy to decrease aches and pains.

Service dogs suffer a unique set of sports injuries and chronic pain ailments related to their work. Dogs that service disabled people may suffer from chronic epaxial back pain from helping their handler with balance and rising from the floor or a chair. Neck pain is common in canine partners because they are used to pull open doors or tote objects. Search and rescue dogs are commonly the victim of skin lacerations and foot, nail and toe injuries from relentlessly searching inhospitable areas for the missing or lost.

Military and police dogs used on patrol may face the biggest toll. Although supreme athletes, these dogs



A U.S. Customs beagle is responsible for sniffing out contraband produce.



PHOTOS BY STONEY CREEK VETERINARY HOSPITAL  
Currently serving in law enforcement, a policy K9 receives a laser therapy treatment during Canine Veterans Day at Stoney Creek Veterinary Hospital in Morton, Pa.

jump out of truck windows, track and pursue suspects, and apprehend assailants, protecting their handler and possibly putting themselves in harm's way.

No one knows better the pain-relieving effects of laser therapy than a service dog handler. Each year I am happy to help handlers keep their canine working dogs in top condition so they can continue to perform. Laser therapy provides exceptional help.

Laser therapy also provides relief to retired service dogs. Many police K9 handlers adopt their partners when the dogs are no longer able to perform their police duties. These dogs are no longer on the payroll and K9 officers often struggle to provide the medical care that



A police dog sinks teeth into a suspect during a demonstration.



Joie the German shepherd serves as a crucial lifeline for his young owner, a boy with cerebral palsy.

these retired athletes need. We created a fund that provides yearly care assistance, including pain management and laser therapy.

I love my small practice in the suburbs of Philadelphia and am proud that we have helped create nationwide recognition for amazing working dogs in all services. I hope you will join us in your state and host an annual K9 Veterans Day event and help honor handlers and their dogs.

Who better than veterinarians to help honor these selfless teams of handlers and their dogs? ●

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This Education Center article was underwritten by Companion Animal Health of Newark, Delaware.