



## February, 2011

### **Pet Spending**

According to a report by market-research company Packaged Facts, Americans spent \$20 billion on veterinary bills in 2010 — an 8.5% increase from a year earlier and more than double the amount spent just a decade ago. Much of that money is being spent on new medical technology. With some of the advances in human health care spreading to the animal kingdom, pet owners have many more options for treatment—and many more chances to fork over money to cure their pets or at least prolong their pets' lives.

Today high-tech procedures and equipment, such as chemotherapy and MRIs — and yes, CAT scans — allow for better diagnosis and more-advanced treatment. They also require highly trained specialists. In the past three years, the percentage of veterinarians who are board certified for small-animal surgery has more than doubled, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association.

The Freedonia Group, a research company, predicts that spending on veterinary care, including services and retail products, will reach \$33 billion in 2014 and \$44 billion by 2019, up from \$24 billion in 2009. Giant pharmaceutical companies like Pfizer, Novartis, and Eli Lilly have pet-care divisions, offering products from pain-control medications and antidepressants to weight-control pills.

The rising cost of pet health care is providing a new boost to another corner of the market: pet insurance. Once considered an afterthought at best and a joke at worst, insurance for cats and dogs is appealing to more consumers as a way to ease the financial bite of pet care. The number of companies insuring pets has doubled in the past five years, to 12, with premiums growing an average of more than 20 percent a year over that time, to \$350 million in 2009. *Source: Smart Money February, 2011*

### **Vet Regenerative Medicine Center Formed**

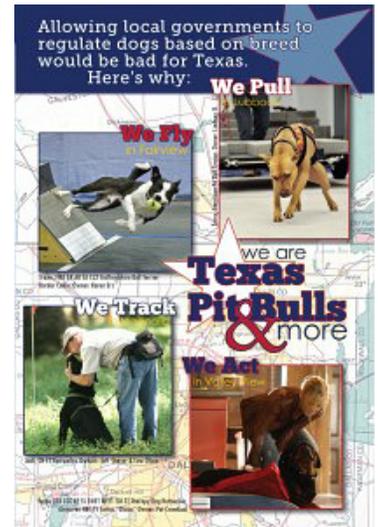
Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center and the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine have joined to form the Virginia Tech/Wake Forest Center for Veterinary Regenerative Medicine, the two schools announced Tuesday. The partnership will bring researchers together to develop regenerative medicine treatments for animals and people. The new center will conduct “translational” research to turn discoveries made at Wake Forest Baptist’s Institute for Regenerative Medicine into new treatments. Regenerative medicine focuses on engineering replacement tissues and organs in the lab or using cell therapies to restore organ and tissue function. Clients of the College of Veterinary Medicine will have the option to enter their pets into clinical trials of new therapies. These trials will allow Wake Forest Baptist researchers to understand more about diseases that affect animals and humans and more quickly assess the effectiveness of regenerative treatments. *Source: The Business Journal*

## New Texas BSL Brochure

The Endangered Breeds Association and Lone Star State APBTC have created a brochure laying out all the reasons why local governments in Texas should not regulate specific dog breeds.

This brochure has photos of APBTs, Rottweilers and bull-breed mixes from around the state engaging in fun activities such as agility, acting and tracking. Currently Texas is one of several states that prohibit breed-specific legislation. However, breed-specific bills have been introduced every year since 2005.

To request a copy of the brochure, visit the Texas Lone Star American Pit Bull Terrier Club website. <http://lsspbtc.com/blog/> or the Endangered Breeds Association <http://www.endangeredbreedsassociation.org/>



## Remote Controlled Police Dogs

Researchers at Auburn University are testing a new system that can help law enforcement and military personnel guide dogs remotely. The researchers have developed a non-invasive solution using a custom harness that can be controlled wirelessly from a computer. The harness contains a GPS unit, sensors, and a radio system.

Handlers can guide the dog using vibrations on the left and right side of the harness as well as various audio tones. This harness could prove particularly helpful in high risk situations where it is too dangerous for an officer to be present guiding a dog.

“If I’m trying to locate drugs, I don’t necessarily want the cartel know that I’m snooping around,” said David M. Bevely, an associate professor of mechanical engineering at Auburn University. But sending a dog to investigate remotely could be “a little less noticeable.”

Other uses include sending a dog to deliver medical aid to military personnel under fire or even having a single handler guide multiple dogs around an airport or compound for inspection.

Alan Poling, a professor at Western Michigan University, says, “You could operate in potentially any setting where you didn’t have to have a handler nearby.”

Rather than using robots or unmanned drones in these situations, dogs have the ability to quickly move around a variety of obstacles. Dogs also have the ability to protect themselves and are not necessarily being put in harm’s way. According to Paul Waggoner, a senior scientist at the Canine Detection Research Institute and a member of the research team, “The reality is, a dog is much more capable at avoiding, recovering, and basically retreating from any kind of dangerous situation than a person is.”

“Often, a person is what’s encumbering a dog,” he said. Beginning in the 1970s, police dogs, or “K-9 units,” began to be widely used in American law enforcement. These units have been used to detect bombs, sniff out drugs, track criminals, chase suspects, and control crowds.

The research team is currently testing the harness, successfully guiding a Labrador to various points hundreds of meters apart.

Thus far the dog has followed commands accurately 80 percent of the time and the harness system has issued correct commands 99 percent of the time.

Researchers are looking to guide the dog through more complex tasks at distances of three to four miles next. *Source: Homeland Security Newswire*

## **New Hanover County to Increase Fines for Leash Law Violations**

NEW HANOVER COUNTY, NC (WECT) – New Hanover County Commissioners voted 3 to 1 Tuesday morning to adopt a new set of fines for people who don't keep a tight leash on their pets. Under the new set of fees, the first time violation will result in a \$25 fine and \$75 for the second. A third violation will range from \$200-\$500, and anyone receiving a fourth violation could face misdemeanor charges. The Health Department hopes the new fees will cut down on the amount of dogs running loose.

### **Why Are Leash Laws important?**

Leash laws should be viewed as preventive measures, designed to minimize risk for dogs, humans, and other animals. Free roaming dogs are at risk of being poisoned, hit by cars, or injured by property owners who have no patience for the dog trespassing. Additionally, as they wander dogs pass and contract parasites and disease from fecal matter. Roaming dogs can be attacked, killed or injured by other dogs or animals.

The absence of leash laws makes an unsafe community. Reasonable and enforceable laws or ordinances are required for control of unrestrained or free roaming animals. Sensible laws should ensure that owned animals are confined to their property or kept on a leash without punishing responsible owners who have control over their dogs in public areas while training, hunting, or working.

Leash laws are also an important part of dog bite prevention. Although most dog bites occur on the property where the dog lives, unrestrained or free-roaming dogs pose a threat to the public. Control of unrestrained and free-roaming animal populations requires an adequately staffed, trained, and funded animal control agency.

### **Shawnee Kansas Abandons Pet Licensing Policy**

To save costs, the Shawnee City Council voted this week to eliminate pet licensing requirements for dogs and cats. Both cats and dogs would still need to be vaccinated for rabies and wear ID tags.

The change was made to save city administrative costs associated with pet licensing. The number of dogs and cats licensed in the city is far below the number living there, according to city staff. The city estimated that only 26 percent of dogs and 4 percent of cats are licensed despite public education efforts and pet amnesty days where people can license free of charge.

Previously, all dogs and cats over six months of age had to be licensed. The city licensed 2,463 dogs and 328 cats in 2009. The fees were \$5 for a spayed or neutered pet and \$10 for a non-altered pet. Total program revenues were \$17,134.

The city spends about \$30,000 annually just on cats for impounding and euthanizing costs. Of the 390 cats impounded in 2009, only 18 were reclaimed by their owners. If a cat is reclaimed the owner pays the fees; otherwise, the city is responsible for them.

Shawnee still requires a Special Animal Permit to keep more than two dogs over the age of six months or more than two cats over the age of six months. A \$50 initial permit fee along with an inspection of the shelter and living conditions for the animals is required. *Source: Kansas City Star*

### **Nebraska to Consider Reopening Horse Processing Plants**

An Agriculture Committee is scheduled to hear a bill that could lead to the reopening of horse processing plants. Horse processing plants have been closed nationwide since 2007, but Sen. Tyson Larson says reopening them would be beneficial to economic development.

In January, he introduced LB 305, which would create a state meat inspection program allowing horse meat to be transported across state lines to outside markets should a plant reopen.

Larson said reopening plants is a no-brainer.

"It would add jobs, grow business and put money back into the hands of farmers and ranchers," he said. "If Nebraska is the only state that reopens plants, then it will become a hub for the industry. Where there's a hub - there's jobs."

Larson said the economy is being negatively affected because farmers and ranchers are not receiving the profit they once were when processing plants were open.

"They used to be able to sell horses destined for plants for \$500-\$600, and now they're lucky to get \$100," he said. "That's \$400-\$500 per animal they're not spending locally, and that's not going back into the economy."

A Jan. 11 "Horse Slaughter Prevention Bills and Issues" report from the Congressional Research Service, which provides informational reports to Congressional staff, indicates horse processing was a lucrative business before plants closed.

According to the report, 105,000 horses were slaughtered for human consumption in the United States in 2006, which was the last full year horses were processed in the country.

More than 17,000 metric tons of horsemeat were exported at a value of approximately \$65 million to markets such as France, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Japan and Mexico. In the 1980s, more than 300,000 horses were processed annually in 16 U.S. plants.

A more extensive report is expected from the Government Accountability Office in March. *Source: North Platte Telegraph*

## **Dog Toxic Xylitol in Gums, Mints, Desserts ... and Now Drugs**

*Xylitol is a sugar alcohol -- an artificial sweetener created from birch, raspberries, plums and corn. This sweetener is found in many human "sugar free" products, such as gum, candies and other sweets. It has been known for quite some time that there is a link between xylitol ingestion and hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) in dogs that can be fatal.*

In her **"Fully Vetted"** blog this week, Dr. Patty Khuly writes:

I've written about the dog-toxicity of the popular sugar substitute xylitol so often and so fervently that a Google search for "xylitol and dogs" digs up my past posts on the subject among the first several findings. And that's cool. But it's not nearly enough. Indeed, the fact that I'm up there tells me precious few people are getting the news. Which is why I keep trying ...

Yes, xylitol is still killing dogs ... more dogs than ever before. This, despite my efforts and those of like-minded big mouths who seek to inform *all* U.S. consumers that xylitol is a menace to dogdom.

How menacing? A few sugar-free breath fresheners, a pack of gum, a spilled tin of mints, a sugar-free dessert cup. It takes only a little of this toxin to send a dog into hypoglycemia-induced seizures, and just a little bit more to bring on liver failure.

And what's worse is not so much its [extreme toxicity](#) ... but its *insidiousness*. Let me explain:

Xylitol is a great product. It's a natural extract from the birch tree, and it takes only a little bit of this stuff to sweeten a whole lot. It's therefore less expensive than other sugar substitutes. And it happens to taste better than most of them. Diabetics everywhere can rejoice! The tooth fairy, too.

All of which is why consumer product manufacturers have been slowly and quietly replacing other sweeteners with xylitol ... in everything, not just products that are labeled sugar-free.

And that's the trouble. When I first started writing about xylitol three or four years ago the number of consumer products containing xylitol numbered less than a hundred in the U.S. Moreover, they were largely restricted to the arena of sugar-free gums and foods. Fast-forward to today and the list is way longer and much more diverse. You can find xylitol in everything from Flintstones vitamins to commonly prescribed drugs.

These latter products pose more of a problem for dog owners and veterinarians for a variety of reasons.

These products never used to contain xylitol. In fact, I used to recommend Flintstones vitamins for my patients. Now I have to caution my clients to stick to pet-only brands *and* to be very diligent about reading labels. But it took months before I became aware of the change in this brand's ingredients. (So you know, xylitol is included in only a few of the Flintstones formulations, not all.)

What's worse — and even more stressful for veterinarians — is that it's not just common consumer products anymore that we have to watch for. The human versions of drugs, especially the children's elixirs, are now being formulated with xylitol for greater pediatric palatability. Unfortunately, the lower doses in the kids' meds are exactly what some of our smaller animal patients require.

Got a little dog who needs hycodan syrup for a cough, or the bronchodilator theophylline for breathing? Even if you've been getting a drug for months or years as an elixir from the same exact pharmacy, beware. Preparations of these drugs may soon change to reflect the widening market for xylitol as a sweetener.

Case in point: This week I sought to relieve a clients' small dog of back pain associated with recurrent episodes of [intervertebral disc disease](#). In so doing, I prescribed a dog-only non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug, and the smallest dosage of gabapentin (used for both seizures and neurogenic pain) currently formulated. But the pharmacy had run out of the 100 mg capsules, which is why I received a call from the pharmacist to see if I would OK the liquid (elixir) version instead.

Now, I'd *like* to say I'm always up on every single drug and all the new formulations, but I'm not. It's just too damn much info to consume on a regular basis. I had, however, just read through *Plumb's Veterinary Drug Handbook* on this exact point: available formulations of gabapentin. And guess what? Some commercially prepared versions of liquid gabapentin have xylitol in them — and it was one of these very versions my pharmacist was offering.

The same drug I was offering my patient might have killed her had I not known about the change!

Now, I don't know how much of the elixir it would've taken to send her into seizures, but rest assured, this little dog was already getting the high end of the drug's dose, so I think I'm justified in fearing the worst for other dogs all over the country whose pharmacists don't make the call (it happens all the time), or whose veterinarians haven't yet heard of the dangers pediatric elixirs now pose to animals.

Does this shock you? It should. It *terrifies* me.

[http://www.petmd.com/blogs/fullyvetted/2011/feb/xylitol\\_now\\_in\\_drugs](http://www.petmd.com/blogs/fullyvetted/2011/feb/xylitol_now_in_drugs)

## **Cleveland County Proposed Changes to Ordinance**

The Cleveland County Board of Health voted unanimously to approve a new tethering ordinance. The ordinance lists the proper ways to put a leash on an animal. Cleveland County commissioners will hear the ordinance for possible adoption. County Commissioner Ronnie Hawkins, Cleveland County Humane Society President Marguerite Mebane and the county's animal control department contributed to the ordinance.

The proposed changes are simple and effective:

### Sec. 3-1. Definitions

Tether means tying out or fastening an animal on a chain, leash or other like device so that it can range only within a set radius.

### Sec. 3-7. (h) Cruelty to Animals

It shall be unlawful for an owner or keeper of any animal to restrain an animal in an unsafe manner as outlined under section 14-362.3 of the General Statutes. In addition, a tether shall be at least ten (10) feet long with swivels on both ends, shall not exceed ten (10) percent of the animal's body weight and shall be attached to a properly fitting harness or collar to prevent choking, strangulation, unjustifiable pain, suffering or risk of death. A tethered animal shall have access to suitable and sufficient clean water, food and appropriate shelter.

## **Stray Pit Bull Saves Woman, Child from Attacker**

PORT CHARLOTTE, Fla. — The wandering 65-pound Pit Bull mix might have seemed menacing to some passerby, but one woman will always remember him as her “guardian angel.”

The dog, which authorities think is lost and not a stray, successfully thwarted a robbery attack on a mother and her 2-year-old son, who were held at knifepoint.

The Florida woman, who has been identified by authorities simply as “Angela,” was leaving a playground with her toddler son in Port Charlotte when a man approached her in the parking lot with a knife and told her not to make any noise or sudden movements. Angela didn't have to do either to protect herself and her child — a dog mysteriously ran to the scene and charged the man, who quickly fled.

After the alleged thief ran away, Angela quickly placed her son, Jordan, in the car and tried to drive off. Before she could, though, the dog jumped into her backseat, waiting with her for the police and animal control officers to arrive at the scene.

The dog was transported to a local shelter and if his owners don't step forward within five days, Jones said, Angela and her family plan to adopt the savior she named “Angel.”

Animal control officers and shelter workers believe Angel is lost, and not a stray, because of his good health, sturdy weight and mild temperament.

*Source: NBC2.com*

## **MN Grad Student Sentenced for Ferret Farm ‘Liberation’**

A University of Minnesota graduate student was sentenced to six months in prison Monday for raiding a ferret farm in 2006.

Scott DeMuth, a teaching assistant in the sociology department, pleaded guilty last year for conspiring to commit animal enterprise terrorism for releasing dozens of breeding ferrets during the break-in at Lakeside Ferrets Inc. in Howard Lake, MN.

As part of his plea bargain, prosecutors dropped charges that he was connected to [a 2004 University of Iowa laboratory break-in](#) that resulted in the release of thousands of test mice and rats.

Evidence linking DeMuth, 23, to the break-ins was found during a search of an apartment he shared with other activists protesting the 2008 Republican National Convention in St. Paul.

The Animal Liberation Front claimed responsibility for both incidents on its website. The FBI considers the group a domestic terrorist group.

Jerry Vlasak, a spokesman for the North American Animal Liberation Press Office, said although DeMuth will be incarcerated, he will likely inspire other activists.

For many, jail time is not a deterrent for "liberating" animals from businesses and labs, Vlasak said.

*Source: MN Daily.com*

## **Shelter Workers Face Animal Cruelty Charges**

Three shelter workers face multiple misdemeanor animal cruelty charges after puppies infected with a contagious virus were brought to a city animal shelter in December. According to city police, seven 7-month-old Chihuahua or Chihuahua-mix puppies infected with canine parvovirus were brought in by one of their caretakers to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) shelter.

Some of the puppies displayed obvious life threatening conditions and tests confirmed parvovirus. The puppies were subsequently euthanized and animal control was notified. The three shelter workers were each charged with seven counts of animal cruelty by Winchester Animal Control.

The SPCA director said cases of parvovirus are uncommon at the shelter. But he said after the infected puppies were brought in, the shelter was forced to quarantine other dogs as a precaution and begin immediate countermeasures, including a complete cleandown from top to bottom with special materials.

Other dogs at the shelter fell ill and although it remains unclear whether those dogs had parvovirus some of the sick dogs were also euthanized.

*Source: AVMA Smart Brief; NVDaily.com*

*Note: No details on the charges are currently available. The shelter workers will appear in court March 16.*

### ***Protecting your right to responsibly own and breed animals.***

**Join NCRAOA. See our home page for membership information and application**

*For more information on animal health, training, reports on pet issues, animal sheltering, or to learn the difference between animal welfare and animal rights – visit our website at [www.ncraoa.com](http://www.ncraoa.com)*



North Carolina Responsible Animal Owners Alliance, Inc. (NCRAOA) is a statewide organization of animal owners and professionals dedicated to animal welfare, responsible animal ownership, and maintaining the rights of responsible citizens to breed and own animals. NCRAOA, a 501(c)3 organization, provides education and information to the public and supports reasonable and humane animal welfare laws. Permission granted to copy and distribute NCRAOA News and Views in its entirety as is.