

Everyday Miracles from OrthoPets

By Jennifer M. Brauns

Every once in a while we get wind of a story that just captivates us beyond words. This is one of those stories. If you read "A Dog Named Dare" in our April/May issue, you'll probably remember that after numerous surgeries and unsuccessful attempts to help this little two-legged Sheltie (both remaining legs on his right side), Martin Kaufmann of OrthoPets saved the day. That is nothing unusual for Martin. He makes miracles happen, sometimes life-saving miracles, all the time. Here is the OrthoPets story.

It all started in 2003 when Martin's cousin's dog Walt suffered a stroke and lost the use of his front leg; he could only knuckle over and drag it. Walt's veterinarian recommended amputation which came as a huge surprise to Martin who happened to work making orthotic and prosthetic devices for patients at Children's Hospital in Salt Lake City at the time. It made much more sense to Martin to use an orthotic device to position Walt's leg so that he could walk normally. Although it took a few tries to get the device just right, Martin succeeded and soon after, he and his wife Amy started OrthoPets.

Martin spent extensive time and energy researching dog knees, wrists, elbows and shoulders. His next client was a patient of Alameda East Animal Hospital. After making braces as a hobby for a few years, Martin saw the real potential for his devices and decided to give up working with humans to concentrate his efforts full-time on dogs. Although the majority of their clients are dogs, Amy told us that they have worked on a turkey vulture, an orangutan, llamas, alpacas, horses, goats, sheep, a baby calf and cats. "Our mentality is that no task is too big," Amy shared.

While almost half of their clients come from veterinarian referrals, oddly enough, only about 10 percent of their clients reside in Colorado. They currently see about 90-100 new patients each month, but are moving and expanding their practice to a beautiful new facility to accommodate even more clients. They are also adding a veterinarian to their staff who will only handle OrthoPets-related cases and a physical therapist to work with rehabilitating clients. The new clinic plans to offer acupuncture and laser therapies as well.

As if Martin's plate is not already full, he spends every Thursday at Colorado State University's Veterinary Medicine School working with their Orthopedic and Oncology staff and



Leroy Golden with OrthoPets client Karma

making devices for their patients. He consults with hundreds of veterinarians around the country and lectures at many major universities.

Martin wants veterinarians to know what he knows before they ever remove an entire limb. Often a partial amputation along with a prosthetic is a much better solution than a fully amputated limb. Sometimes dogs are too old or fragile to undergo an amputation, but there are numerous solutions that OrthoPets can provide to make their patients mobile again. "We work with worst-case scenarios all day long," said Amy. It truly is what they do best.

OrthoPets offers back leg braces for stifle (knee), hock (ankle) and paw as well as hind limb prosthetics. They also offer elbow, carpus (wrist) and paw braces and fore limb prosthetics for front legs. Other offerings include custom adaptive devices such as the "hoppy vest" shown on the two-legged Chihuahua Abby (bottom right photo). They work with manufacturers of carts and wheelchair-type devices to assist some clients and have custom-crafted carts for some smaller dogs for whom other carts are too heavy.

OrthoPets is able to manufacture custom orthotics and prosthetic devices in five to seven business days from receipt of a leg casting and measurements. They also offer an

Custom Orthotic & Prosthetic Solutions for Pets

expedited service for an additional \$200 to cover the costs of rush shipping and employee overtime. For clients who live out-of-state, they can provide casting instructions for their veterinarian who most likely has all of the supplies already on hand. The pet's new device will be shipped along with an appropriate "Initial Wearing Schedule" to help the pet adjust comfortably to its new device. The OrthoPets website is extremely comprehensive and walks visitors through every step to measure, mold and order a device.

OrthoPets only hires individuals whose pets have been patients of theirs. Needless to say, their staff are some of their biggest fans as they have all been through the process themselves. So how much do OrthoPets devices cost? Much less than you might imagine. Most of their devices cost between \$400 and \$700 compared to the \$2000 that insurance companies commonly pay for human knee braces.

Frames for the OrthoPets devices are made out of composite plastic or carbon and should outlast their lifetime. The materials do not change shape, wear out or break down under normal conditions. The soft-goods which make up the rest of the devices are the straps, hinges, tread, diabetic foam padding and prosthetic parts. The hinges and prosthetic devices are designed to last many years, while the foam padding, straps and tread usually last 12-24 months. Almost all of their devices are waterproof.

"For Denver patients, it usually takes about a week to get you in, although in emergency cases we will always fit someone in. We make house calls, come in early or stay late if needed. We do whatever we can to help," Amy shared. For out-of-state clients, they have trained representatives in many large cities or patients can come to their Denver office.

During a recent visit to OrthoPets, we met a very special Sheltie named Jasmine who had just arrived in Denver with her humans from Ohio to see Martin. Look for her story and others in upcoming issues and if you can't wait to learn more, there are many testimonials and stories available on their website. For more information on OrthoPets, please call 303-953-2545 or visit their website at www.orthopets.com.

Can You Help Andre?

Andre came to OrthoPets for help from a shelter in Alaska. Dumb Friends League is trying to find him a forever home. If you can help or would like more information, please call 303-751-5772.

