

Personal Perspectives:

September 11 Remembered





On September 11, 2001, we became united not only in our shock and grief but also in our need to help. We prayed, mourned, and made donations. Some people abandoned their everyday lives to offer whatever services they could. Countless technicians, veterinarians, and other personnel responded to the call for volunteers without hesitation. *Veterinary Technician* recognizes the efforts of these extraordinary individuals. Here are some of their remarkable stories.

The world felt like it stopped turning for me on September 11 as it did for millions of other Americans. Like every

Insets: (Top) SAR dog Porkchop waits for instruction. (Middle) Dr. Debra Campbell and Amy Newfield, CVT treat Appollo. (Bottom) VMAT-1 members on September 12. Left to right, Amy Newfield, CVT, Beth Richard, CVT, Dr. Peter Coakley, Commanding Officer Dr. Barry Kellogg, Dr. Dennis Dougherty, Dr. Debra Campbell, Lyn Garson, CVT, and Dr. Lori Gordon.



VIEW from a VMAT TECHNICIAN

Amy Newfield, CVT, VMAT-1
Ayer, Massachusetts

Amy Newfield assesses Porkchop's paw. (Courtesy of T. L. Litt)

To her citizen, I have my own story of what I was doing that morning and how the tragedy affected me. That day, I was scheduled to work the noon to close shift at the Sterling Veterinary Clinic in Sterling, Massachusetts where I am the certified veterinary head technician. When the first plane struck the north tower, I was still at home.

As I watched the horrific events unfold, I received the email that changed my life forever. It was from the administrative officer on my Veterinary Medical Assistance Team (VMAT) who was preparing a list of those who could be deployed immediately. Without hesitating, I replied that I was ready to go. Throughout the rest of the day at the clinic, I kept wondering what they could possibly use us for.

It wasn't until 5 PM the next day that I got the call from a fellow team member. "We're going," she confirmed. My heart raced as I hung up the phone. What had I gotten myself into? How was I going to help? There were human – not animal – casualties there. I left my home at 8 PM that night and joined my team on a van caravan that arrived in NYC at 3:30 the next morning.

Our VMAT mission was simply stated: "To provide veteri-

nary care for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Search and Rescue (SAR) dogs." The mission was expanded to include all SAR dogs (i.e., independent, NYPD K-9, and cadaver dogs).

We covered three positions in NYC. The first was at the Jacob Javits Convention Center on West 34th Street, where the FEMA SAR dogs were housed. This position evolved into a working triage area as well as our Command Center.

The second position, "West Command," was appropriately located on West Street a couple of blocks north of the WTC. West Command was an amazing place, where many different organizations joined efforts for one cause. We used the Suffolk County SPCA spay/neuter van with a small surgery suite for blood work, hospitalization, critical care, and storage. Veterinarians and technicians from the Long Island Veterinary Medical Association (LIVMA) helped with the veterinary care. The Suffolk County SPCA only handled law enforcement at the time, but they helped organize civilian volunteers to help treat the SAR dogs. In addition, The Animal Medical Center allowed use of their facilities for emergencies. Most of our veterinary duties were performed at

West Command, which we called the "MASH" unit.

The last position we covered was a mobile triage center. Initially, the only triage station set up was the one on West Street, but many of the dog handlers found it difficult to walk the 10 or 15 minutes from the "pile" to have their dogs checked at that site. There was also some concern about what would happen if a dog fell while on the pile. How would it receive medical attention? We were able to set up the mobile triage unit by using a "gator" equipped with medical supplies that could easily move around the pile. A gator is an all-terrain vehicle that tows a small flatbed. The flatbed was used to transport downed patients and exhausted handlers back to their units, which were situated at varying locations around the pile.

Each VMAT position was unique. The command center was a little more relaxed. I did a lot of administrative tasks there, such as filling out paperwork, answering field questions, searching out equipment, and acting as the center for the other positions. I also performed clinical duties, such as triaging the dogs that came back from the pile, "deconning" (decontaminating) them, and working beside a VMAT veterinarian to provide medical assistance. We treated an average of 15 dogs in each 12-hour shift.

At West Command, I performed more technical duties. I took medical histories, triaged, administered subcutaneous fluids to help combat dehydration, set up medications, and processed blood work. We also deconned every dog that came off the pile. The dogs were filthy, and we became concerned about the toxins they were walking through. Each dog got its limbs washed with a disinfectant, eyes flushed, and paws checked. Most of them were given subcutaneous fluids as well. We saw an average of 40 dogs a day at West Command.

The mobile triage center was the last position I worked. My duties there included loading backpacks with supplies and driving to the pile. We had to wear respirators and hard hats because this area presented a greater risk than where the civilians were working four blocks away. (Access to the pile was limited to only those with proper security clearance.) My job was to "check in" with the SAR teams located around the pile.

They would radio us if a dog needed medical attention, and

we would drive to meet them at the given location. We mostly provided the SAR teams with supplies and minor medical care for the dogs.

Between all three positions, there were very few emergencies. The handlers were very conscious of their dogs and how they were coping both physically and mentally with the stresses of working the pile. The well-being of their dogs was a high priority. Some dogs suffered lacerations and burns. Others became mildly dehydrated. Some presented with stress-induced diarrhea, and a few had unexplainable urinary tract infections. Thankfully, there were no major injuries. The handlers took great care of their dogs and were very appreciative of the high level of veterinary care the animals received while at Ground Zero.

For 10 days I worked with the same dogs and the same people. We became a family and it felt that way to every one of us. We didn't know each other's full names or where we had all grown up, but we were brothers and sisters who lived in a place called Ground Zero. At the end of 10 days, we felt we had known each other for years.

Federal employee status gave me access to restricted areas and an in-depth perspective of the tragedy. I have never been more physically and mentally exhausted as I was at Ground Zero. My 12-hour shifts quickly turned into 15- and 16-hour shifts. No one can walk away from such an experience without it changing their life. Under such terrible circumstances, I will always be thankful that I was able to help – something so many Americans wanted to do but couldn't. I joined VMAT because I wanted to use my skills in a different way. I had that opportunity at Ground Zero. Although I have always been proud of being a certified veterinary technician and of my accomplishments in my job, it is difficult to compare that to what I was able to contribute in NYC. I will always be proud that I was one of the veterinary technicians who had a chance to help at Ground Zero.



Courtesy of VMAT-1

The Veterinary Medical Assistance Teams (VMATs)

are part of the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS). There are four VMATs from various parts of the country. Amy's team, the Massachusetts or New England team, was the first established VMAT as well as the first team to be deployed to NYC on September 11. The other three teams are based in Maryland, North Carolina, and California. Joining VMAT is like being in the reserves. VMAT members are normal civilian veterinary technicians, but they can be called up by the NDMS whenever veterinary professionals are needed in a disaster. VMAT members can be deployed for no more than 2 weeks at a time. Members attend meetings and education sessions and are trained on hazardous materials, the incident command system, survival skills, and other disaster protocols. To learn more about VMAT, visit their Web site at www.vmat.org.



FROM MY VIEW

Anna Longo-Mulhaul, LVT
Huntington, NY

The Manhattan skyline is changed forever.

My boss at Smithhaven Veterinary Hospital in St. James, New York, Dr. Cliff Conrack, works closely with the Suffolk County SPCA and was asked on September 11 to donate supplies to their MASH unit. My coworkers and I quickly gathered bandages, injectable antibiotics, surgical packs, and other materials. When the Suffolk County SPCA came to pick up the supplies that first night, I offered my services.

A small group of us met at 7:30 PM at the 4th Police Precinct of Suffolk County, climbed into the MASH unit, and started our journey to Ground Zero. As we crossed the Brooklyn Bridge, all we could see in the darkness was

a smoky haze over a drastically changed Manhattan skyline. As we approached Ground Zero, our surroundings resembled a demolition scene from a Hollywood movie. People were wandering around aimlessly. A thick, gray film covered everything. We were given special asbestos-absorbing masks to wear.

We walked through the streets in disbelief. It was truly amazing to see everyone working together. In all of the chaos, I found my role in helping to gather supplies. I was happy to play a supporting part, however minor. Although I was only at the site for a few hours that first night, I was proud to see the veterinary community pulling together to help.



A SAR dog is brought to the MASH unit for treatment.

SPCA on the Scene

Gerald Lauber, EdD,
Director, Suffolk County SPCA,
Smithtown, New York

The Suffolk County SPCA MASH unit was called to report to Ground Zero to provide assistance to the SAR dogs. We set up the unit at West Street, a couple of blocks from Ground Zero. The acrid smoke, loud sirens, and cries of panic and fear created one of the most chaotic scenes imaginable. The MASH unit started operations immediately. With the cooperation of the LIVMA and the assistance of Dr. Barbara Kalvig of the New York Veterinary Hospital and The Animal Medical Center, veterinarians and veterinary technicians were placed on 12-hour shifts starting that evening.

By Tuesday evening, SAR dog teams from the metropolitan area arrived to work the pile. These teams left the pile only when the handlers and dogs were on the verge of collapse. The first 2 days of operation were brutal. Some members of

the Suffolk County SPCA were on the scene 24 hours a day.

After the terrorist attack on the WTC, everyone wanted to help. Many people donated supplies, and hundreds of volunteer veterinarians and technicians gave freely of their time. The Suffolk County SPCA helped organize these activities.

One group of professionals that really made things happen were the veterinary technicians! They arrived at our MASH unit on September 11 and stayed continuously until mid-October when we transferred our operations indoors. No one ever had to ask the veterinary technicians to work. They set up stations, stocked medical supplies, assisted the veterinarians, and kept things going. No one ever would have guessed that this ad hoc group was not part of a well-organized plan.

VETERINARIANS FROM THE NEW YORK AREA VOLUNTEERED THEIR SERVICES AT GROUND ZERO...

through Dr. Barbara Kalvig and Dr. Mark Franzat, who is affiliated with the LIVMA. Numerous companies and nonemergency organizations provided support as well. Paul Jolly from Petco, Marshall Meyers from the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) of Canada, and Charles Bunting from IDEXX Laboratories sent hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of supplies and aid to us. Dennis Sprung from the American Kennel Club visited Ground Zero and donated a radiography machine for use in the MASH unit.



MANNING A MAKESHIFT CLINIC

Gregory S. Carastro, LVT
New York City

My colleagues and I at Central Veterinary Associates in Valley Stream, New York provided emergency assistance to the many canine patrol dogs needed for the rescue efforts at Ground Zero. The caring doctors and staff at our practice enabled us to allocate one of our veterinarian's time almost entirely to aid in the coordination of the rescue efforts and the development of a medical protocol for the dogs in need of help.

My coworkers, including Dr. John Charos, Dawn Schaffer, Alex Starodubtsev, and I arrived at this unimaginable scene in conjunction with the Suffolk County SPCA, Office of Emergency Management, FEMA, LIVMA, VMAT, and personnel from other local clinics. We gathered at Stuyvesant High School to get organized. This was only the beginning of what would turn into many weeks of triage, treatment, and care for the injured animals. In addition to the SAR dogs, a large number of pets were trapped in the surrounding buildings, which had been evacuated following the collapse of the twin towers. Many of these animals were suffering from dehydration, malnutrition, and other injuries.

Once on site, we developed a treatment protocol to respond to the patients' needs. The MASH unit was initially just an area on the street. We transformed the Suffolk County SPCA mobile unit into a makeshift emergency room and full-service laboratory.

At first, supplies and equipment were sparse. Within hours after we arrived, however, supplies were delivered curbside from countless organizations. As the days passed, we acquired some tents to add to our street caravan. Under the tents, we constructed four identical triage stations. A veterinarian and three technicians were assigned to each tent. Most of the patients we saw were treated for minor cuts and abrasions, ocular irritations, corneal abrasions, dehydration, exhaustion, hyperthermia, and occasionally trauma.

Our makeshift hospital treated more than 600 animals from as far away as Mississippi, Georgia, and Canada. Every pet – regardless of its injury – required some basic



Gregory Carastro analyzes blood inside the MASH unit.

treatment. Every SAR dog had its eyes flushed and paws washed and bandaged (if necessary). The dogs were extremely prone to footpad injuries from the hazardous terrain and intense heat from burning debris. Almost all of them received subcutaneous fluids to supplement their electrolytes and help combat dehydration. Even when on the verge of collapse, the SAR dogs eagerly awaited the chance to return to the pile to continue with the rescue. The handlers of these heroic animals were just as determined and brave. Without the full support of the Suffolk County SPCA, I don't think that we could have been nearly as effective.

IDEXX LABORATORIES SHOWED UNPRECEDENTED GENEROSITY BOTH FINANCIALLY AND OTHERWISE.

Pamela Goldberg, an IDEXX Diagnostic Consultant, made herself available on a 24-hour basis for questions and support. This selfless giving of her time and expertise was immensely appreciated and necessary during this crisis. In addition, IDEXX has allocated this lab for future use by the Suffolk County SPCA. The laboratory equipment has been stationed at Central Veterinary Associates as a home base for deployment when needed.

TECHNICIANS to the (PET) RESCUE

Nancy Shaffran, RVT, VTS(ECC)
New York City

When I heard that a pet rescue operation was being organized at an empty municipal pier, I went immediately. Like most New Yorkers, I wanted to volunteer my services. I was ill-prepared for the total chaos I found. Hundreds of distraught pet owners were waiting for permission to get into their homes at Ground Zero. Many were becoming increasingly desperate as time ticked by and their animals had gone another hour without food or water. Many were worried that they would find their pets dead.

At the pet rescue center, my partner Liz and I helped set up an information desk. Many owners asked the same question: "How long can my pet go without food or water?" In answering, I tried to factor in all I knew about veterinary medicine and the little I knew about the conditions at Ground Zero. Smoke inhalation was a factor to consider for the abandoned animals as was the asbestos dust blown in through the windows covering whatever food and water was available.

Often just talking with the owners helped soothe their mounting anxiety. I did not let on how hopeless I felt when a man told me that his 8-week-old Shiba Inu puppy was alone in its crate for the third day or when a woman explained that her four parakeets had no seed or water left. This woman was afraid to go into her apartment, so I volunteered to go for her. I wanted to see the devastation for myself to try to make sense of it all.

It was on Thursday night, September 13th, that I boarded the park ranger truck to head down to Ground Zero. New York looked as alive as ever – except that everyone I saw was either police or fire personnel or an armed soldier. The National Guard was pitching tents in the park. One area had become a helicopter landing pad. Fireboats lined the river, and bucket brigades were in full operation hauling out debris. Tented cities were being erected to handle the donations of food, clothing, and medical supplies that were pouring in. The air was thick with smoke and the smell of burning rubber. We had to walk the last six blocks, slogging through 4 inches of gray mud, concrete dust, papers, and shattered glass. When we got to the building where the woman's parakeets were trapped, there was no electricity and, therefore, no elevator. The parakeets I had come to rescue were on the fourth floor. A man with our group was rescuing his three cats from the 28th floor, to which he climbed on foot. We formed teams, two by two, each carrying flashlights and pet carriers. We had 5 minutes to get in and out of each apartment. When we all met back in the lobby, we had rescued seven birds, six cats, and a hamster.

Back at the center, we were met with applause – the same tireless applause that greeted the 400+ animals that were rescued over the next 3 days. We had set up veterinary and pet supply stations at the center. Each animal was examined, treated, and sent on its way with whatever supplies it needed (e.g., food, dishes, litterboxes, leashes), all of which were donated.

Although these pet owners were themselves homeless, they were overjoyed to be reunited with their pets. More than 300 volunteers offered foster homes, and hundreds of others stopped by to offer assistance. Other people sent supplies, money, and well wishes. I was honored to be a part of this effort. The strength of the human spirit moved me, and the resilience of the animals amazed me. The Shiba Inu puppy shrieked when the subcutaneous fluids were given. Otherwise, its tailed wagged furiously.

Owners of stranded animals came to the pet rescue at Pier 40 in the hope of being reunited with their pets.





Courtesy of Christine Wassenaar, AHT, VMAT-2

Precious is being treated after her ordeal.

A “Tail” of SURVIVAL

Steve and D.J. Kerr (Owners of Precious)
New York City

On September 11, we were out of town, and our cat Precious was being cared for by a housesitter who traveled to and from our apartment by subway. On that morning and many days thereafter, that subway didn't operate.

Our apartment building is located directly across the street from what used to be WTC #3. The building has 11 stories, and our loft is on the ninth floor. When the towers collapsed, the force of the explosion shattered all of the building's front windows. Parts of the walls were also blown in, and the apartment was covered in debris. The authorities labeled our apartment a crime scene and considered the building to be too dangerous to enter. In those first few days, we knew the building temperature was very hot, and we feared Precious would not survive.

About a week after the attack, a few relatives and emergency workers were allowed in the building to attempt to find Precious. They braved the smashed-in elevators and fire escapes. With gas masks covering their faces, they climbed the nine flights of stairs in the stifling heat. They walked through glass and debris, barely able to see because of the smoke and darkness. Although they did not find Precious, they left out food and water in the hope that she was still alive.

When we were allowed to return to our building on September 21, we found that the food that had been left for Precious had not been touched. Nor were there any footprints in the dust to suggest that she had moved around the loft since the towers had collapsed. We had prepared ourselves to find her lifeless body, but Precious wasn't there. We didn't think to look on the roof because it didn't seem

that anything could have been up there and survived, given what had landed there.

On September 30, a city worker putting lights on the roof of our building to aid in the rescue effort heard the cries of what he thought might be a cat. He informed the two building superintendents, and a dramatic chase and rescue ensued. The rescue eventually involved the superintendents, a rescue dog, and volunteers from the Suffolk County SPCA. When we got a call that Precious had been found, our concern that she might become panicked and fall off the roof was mixed with incredulity that she was not only alive but capable of eluding her captors.

We “rushed” to the loft – a process that involved taking two subways (since no taxis were allowed south of Canal Street), stopping at the police command center, and walking what seemed to be an endless quarter-mile to the loft accompanied by a policeman (who himself had suffered from smoke inhalation and a leg injury). When we finally arrived, we found that the cat was indeed Precious, but she was in terrible shape. We were rushed by jeep to the emergency animal rescue hospital set up by the Suffolk County SPCA. Precious had numerous injuries: There were multiple particles of steel and glass in her eyes. The bottoms of her feet were completely blackened by the scorching heat of the roof. She also had kidney, liver, and lip infections from drinking the contaminated rain water that was her only sustenance for those 19 days. She had lost so much weight (from 8 lb to 4.5 lb) that, when veterinary personnel tried to feed her intravenously, the needle slid out the other side. But she was *alive!*

We were able to take Precious home that night and were instructed to feed her some pumpkin pie mix. We had been warned that her digestive system had been shut down for so long that she probably would not be able to eat solid food several days. Someone, however, forgot to tell Precious. She began eating less than 2 hours after returning home (and has scarcely stopped since!).

Today Precious is healthy and amazingly well adjusted, given what she has been through. She is back to her previous weight. The glass and steel in her eyes were washed out with no lasting damage. The soles of her paws are permanently black, but she can jump as well as before and seems to be in no discomfort. Her infections have all cleared, thanks to many competent and good-hearted volunteer medical personnel. The staff of the Suffolk County SPCA, especially Roy and Lois Gross, played an important role in helping to rescue and care for Precious. These exceptional individuals remained at Ground Zero for more than 3 months to rescue and care for many other cats and dogs. In the meantime, we are still hoping that we can one day return to the apartment building from which Precious made her miraculous escape.

Perspective from the PENTAGON

SSG Ward Lacy,
Fort Myer, Virginia

During my 2 years assigned to the 3rd Infantry (the Old Guard), US Army, Caisson Platoon, I have participated in several events that I will remember for a lifetime. The most recent were those following the September 11 attack at the Pentagon. My primary duty as a veterinary technician in this prestigious unit is to provide veterinary care to the approximately 40 horses that pull the caissons that carry America's fallen service members to their final resting place in Arlington National Cemetery. However, my job with the Caisson Platoon is not limited to veterinary medicine. I also participate in funerals and other ceremonies.

Like the other soldiers in my unit, after the attack on America I assisted with the recovery operation by providing manual labor and security services. I also helped with security at other locations around the Fort Myer, Virginia area. In the weeks after September 11, I served as a lead rider on the caisson in numerous funerals for service members killed at the Pentagon. These were emotional times for both the families and the soldiers. My job has taught me a great deal about American history. It has also given me a great opportunity to take part in our history.



The primary mission of the "Old Guard" is to serve as an escort to the president and to serve as the Army's official ceremonial unit. When first assigned to this unit, I had to attend an intense 3-week training class to become ceremonially qualified. The Caisson Platoon is the last official horse-mounted unit in the US Army (most people remember my platoon from President Kennedy's funeral). As the only technician in the unit, I am on call around the clock. My veterinary duties include maintaining vaccinations, performing annual Coggin's testing on the horses, and assisting with annual physicals and other procedures. I update our platoon leader and the staff veterinarian weekly on the status of each horse. I also manage feed charts and exercise programs, assist with prepurchase examinations, and handle any emergencies that arise. In addition, I supervise five other soldiers, including a farrier, a fabric repair specialist, and a horse trainer.

In Appreciation...

Veterinary Technician® would like to extend its sincere thanks to **Lois Gross** and the entire staff at the **Suffolk County SPCA** in Smithtown, New York, for their invaluable help with this tribute. Lois put us in touch with many extraordinary individuals and also made her own priceless set of photographs from Ground Zero available to us.

The Suffolk County SPCA is a nonprofit, volunteer organization that provides veterinary services in the New York area. To make a donation, volunteer your services, or learn more about them, contact them at:



Suffolk County SPCA

363 Route 11, Smithtown, NY 11787

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Web: www.suffolkspca.org

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