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N.C. Veterinary Medicine Association Awards Grant to Local Program

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Dr. Tom Daniel and Sam with students from West End

Late last year, local equine veterinarian Dr. Tom Daniel, of Southern Pines Equine Associates, became aware of grants being awarded by the North Carolina Veterinary Medicine Association (NCVMA), of which he is a member. Five grants of \$5,000 were to be awarded as part of the NCVMA High Five Grant program.

High Five Grants are awarded to qualified organizations who promote community service as well as compassion and health for the people and animals of North Carolina. The requirements include some degree of veterinary involvement from an NCVMA member plus a strong educational element.

For the past 10 years, Dr. Daniel has volunteered in the schools with the Citizens' Pet Responsibility Committee of Moore County (PRC).

"What a great fit," he says. "We could not let this opportunity pass us by."

At his urging and under his sponsorship, the application was submitted.

Fast forward to 2020, the email read, "Congratulations! The NCVMA High Five Grant committee reviewed the applications submitted and is most pleased to award one of the five grants for 2020 to your group."

It continued, "All grant applicants were notable in their efforts to educate citizens and improve the care of animals in N.C. However, the committee felt your group best fulfilled the criteria, often in a unique manner."

Members of the PRC are excited.

"The High Five Grant from the NCVMA was unexpected and validating," says a spokesman for PRC. "It is wonderful to be acknowledged in this way, by a professional veterinary organization, for what we are striving to do to educate the community and especially our children about taking responsibility for the pets that share our lives".

The concept of a Citizens' Pet Responsibility Committee was proposed to the Moore County Board of Commissioners in 2006. Its establishment as a county committee was approved and funded with the mission of "Providing and driving, with the support of the Moore County Commissioners, solutions to the pet overpopulation crisis in Moore County".

Now in its 12th year in the schools, through a team of more than 60 volunteers, the PRC offers a six session program on pet responsibility to all the public school fourth-graders in Moore County — that's well over 1,200 fourth graders and increasing. They also offer the program in the private and charter school arena with five schools welcoming the program.

In the public schools, the course is often leveraged as part of the Character Education program — being responsible pet owners reinforces respect, responsibility and accountability.

As a committee, the PRC's ultimate aim remains to reduce pet overpopulation. This program educates the next generation of pet owners and ties in perfectly with the character education mission. The students learn about the problem of pet overpopulation, the importance of spaying and neutering, their role in being part of the solution, the health and safety of pets, their safety around various pets, the cost of pet ownership, what it means to be an advocate and the wide range of careers with animals.

The PRC ensures that dogs are in the classroom for at least one of the sessions. These dogs are local therapy dogs and represent the ultimate in responsible dog ownership: they are well-groomed, well cared-for, well-trained and loved. Their owners are wonderful role models for the students.

As part of the program, students attend a final assembly. This event includes guest speakers from our community — veterinarians, veterinary technicians, trainers, police officers with their K9 officers, blind individuals with their guide dogs, military personnel with bomb sniffing dogs, groomers, therapy horse teams and animal rescuers. This segment emphasizes careers with animals and advocacy — including a kind of reverse “advocacy” — dogs caring for us and saving our lives.

The program is a perfect synergy of schools, volunteers, community organizations, career professionals and community leaders.

As part of the program, the students submit a “Speuter Story,” detailing the importance of spaying and neutering and how their pet or the pet of a family member or friend would benefit from being spayed or neutered. Winners receive a voucher for a free spay or neuter at The Spay and Neuter Veterinary Clinic of the Sandhills. The contest is generously underwritten by The Moore County Kennel Club.

The PRC has consulted with more than 40 other NC counties and 16 states about the program. The entire team celebrates when another county follows the path they have forged. For example, Guilford County has launched the program and is now offering it in 19 schools.

The PRC is always very open to helping other counties launch this program through sharing materials and expertise.

Through the years, the prevention aspect of the committee's work has expanded to working with the county to promote subsidized spay and neuter, including offering transportation from the north of the county to and from the clinic in Vass.

A small group of PRC volunteers established a pet pantry to provide food for those family pets in need. A few weeks of food might be all that is needed to prevent a pet from being surrendered. The families of these pets are also advised on additional resources and subsidized spay and neuter procedures for their pets.

Acknowledging the value of the program, many local veterinarians and veterinary technicians enthusiastically give of their time, presenting to the students in the final assembly and reinforcing all that the students have learned during the program, as well as sharing their own professional journeys.

Drs. Megan Buchanan, Tim Boyte, Joe Curry, Tom Daniel, Bri Gindlesperger, Cynthia Eaton, Tony Ioppollo, Elizabeth Lyerly, Stephanie Mickey, Dan Nordland, Megan Ross, Marc Schoenfield and Dana Vamvakias and veterinary technicians Kathleen Dickerson, Hillery Gonzales, Jessica McDaniel, Emily Partain, Kristen Seawell, Jenny Seals and Sophia Valera have all contributed their time and experience to the program.

The materials needed to conduct a program of this scope are sizable. Funding from the County of Moore and donations from Moore County organizations and individuals have made it all possible.

"We are deeply grateful to the Emmanuel Episcopal Thrift Shop, Whispers of Whispering Pines, Coldwell Banker and The Moore County Kennel Club for their continued support through the years," says the spokesman. "Combining the NCVMA grant with other donations and funding will allow us to accommodate a growing community and more avenues for education."

The NCVMA is a professional organization of veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine. Visit their website at www.ncvma.org

For more information on the PRC, visit www.mcprc.org