

New Report Says What Pets Can't

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January 29, 2008 | Vol. 123 | No. 19

Local entrepreneur Jim McPeak has gone to the dogs. Over the last two decades, McPeak has been an enthusiastic promoter of prevention and wellness programs, educating Americans about staying healthy. The creation of his new company, Pet Health Systems LLC, is meant to accomplish the same, but with a twist: His product is for dogs.



Twenty years ago, the Kentucky native landed in Hawaii, where he became the general manager of the Honolulu Club. It was there that McPeak had the opportunity to work with members in a new way.

"People really didn't know much about staying healthy back then," he said. "I came up with an idea to enlist physicians to help design a fitness or lifestyle guide for members."

From there, he moved to Nashville, where he bought HealthTek Inc. and spent the next three years enhancing an existing health/lifestyle assessment program. His last company, Electronic Physician Network (EPN), where he spent six years, eventually was bought by Envoy/WebMD.

Good, better, best

McPeak calls himself a "startup" guy whose motivation comes from helping others. In reality, he works and lives between the technical and consumer worlds.

"I'm a program architect," he said.

His product, the Pet Wellness Report, is a wellness assessment tool that enables pet owners to better care for their pets through early disease intervention. With the help of a diverse advisory board, McPeak and his team created what is essentially a wellness screening program for dogs.

"This product was developed to help veterinarians help their customers through prevention, education and wellness," McPeak said.

A patent is pending for the product. McPeak's initial report is for dogs only; however, he is currently developing feline and equine reports that will be available in early 2008.

Pet Health Systems sells directly to veterinarians at a wholesale price. The veterinarian then decides how much to charge and if the service is optional or becomes part of a routine exam. Pet owners complete a comprehensive lifestyle assessment questionnaire about their pet ahead of time.

"Pet Health Systems offers three lab choices: good, better and best panels," McPeak said. "The client and veterinarian decide which level they want."

A blood sample is drawn and sent to McPeak's lab, with results returned directly to the veterinarian.

"A veterinarian always reviews the results before being released to their client," said McPeak.

As good as words

His idea for the Pet Wellness Report hit McPeak in 2006, and since securing a pending patent, he has been moving ahead at great strides, recently gaining the support of the Tennessee Veterinary Medical Association.

For veterinarians like Dr. David A. Wright, who has practiced in Collierville for 17 years at Collierville Pet Hospital, the new tool just makes sense.

"It helps us educate clients about risk factors and what owners should look for," Wright said. "In this respect, clients can help us take better care of their pets."

His practice served as the beta site beginning in July 2006.

The report is optional to his clients, but Wright reports that about 66 percent of them choose to purchase the Pet Wellness Report. Veterinarians charge from \$45 to \$77 depending on the lab and the depth of a given report.

"We charge our clients close to what we pay," Wright said.

Wright said the report analyzes 27 different parameters that can help detect anything from liver disease to hyperthyroidism.

In the world of medic alert and service dogs, McPeak's product appears to offer greater value. In December, more than 80 service dogs from Memphis and the surrounding Mid-South participated in a free eye screening sponsored by Pet Health Systems and Dr. Bill W. Miller.

"The huge value is that, unlike human patients, pets can't tell you something is wrong," Miller said.

"When you consider the thousands of dollars invested in training service dogs, if we can detect a problem early on, we can treat it and save money."

The local event served as a springboard for a free, national eye screening event to be held May 12. Unlike the local event, the national event will be for service dogs only and will be organized by the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists (ACVO) with the local involvement of McPeak and Miller.

"We want to identify ways to protect service dogs and this is a great opportunity," Miller said. "A tool like the Pet Wellness Report will allow us to develop a database of information to identify dogs by categories, such as search and rescue, and to further research."

Amid the growing popularity of his new product, McPeak keeps a cool head and clear vision.

"My businesses are designed so that everyone wins," he said. "In fact, my business philosophy is 'everyone that touches it has to win.' The Pet Wellness Report is a win for the pet, the pet owner and their veterinarian. I enjoy designing these programs and hearing how this prevention and education tool has helped other veterinarians, and, ultimately, the pets they treat."

To learn more about the national event, visit the ACVO Web site at www.acvo.org.