



Ana Pimsler/Stafford County Sun

Helen Jewett, a veterinarian, spends a moment with Apollo, a sun conure, before drawing blood from him Tuesday at Hartwood Animal Hospital in Stafford.

Animal lover has practice in Hartwood

By **JENNIFER BUSKE**

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STAFFORD — Equipped with a grooming kit in the confines of her family garage, Stafford resident Melody Walker entered the world of animal care when she was just 10 years old.

“My parents went out and bought me a home grooming kit to take care of our family dog,” Walker said. “But then I began grooming the neighbors’ dogs as well. Some very interesting kinds of haircuts came out of that garage.”

Walker is now the groomer at Hartwood Animal Hospital. Located off Celebrate Virginia Parkway in Stafford, the hospital was opened May 15 by local entrepreneur and animal lover Helen Jewett.

“I can’t think of life without hair, feathers and a scale — it just doesn’t seem right,” said Jewett, who has been practicing veterinary medicine for 15 years. “I love what I do.”

From dogs to reptiles, Jewett said she has enjoyed every animal since she was just a little girl.

“I grew up with a father

who loved us grabbing lizards and frogs around our home in Miami,” she said. “I’ve just always had a love of animals and somewhere along the line it changed from upholding not the quantity of life, but the quality of life.”

After graduating from Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine, Jewett worked at three Virginia hospitals before deciding it was time to open her own in Stafford.

“I was ready for a challenge and it just seemed like the next step after working for others for so long,” Jewett said. “I have high standards and there was a lot I wanted to offer my patients.”

Jewett’s Hospital is fully operational, something she wanted to do in order to eventually become part of the American Animal Hospital Association, which sets standards “very high” for veterinary hospitals, she said.

The Hartwood hospital includes an in-house lab, pharmacy, surgical suite and dental unit with a digital X-ray machine, Jewett said, adding

See **HOSPITAL** page B4

HOSPITAL from page B1

she has a particular interest in periodontal (or gum) disease, catching it before it impacts other organs in the body.

"I think she is bringing something great to this area," said Robin Mattingly, the hospital's manager. "She provides a lot of education to her clients and feels strongly about preventative medicine. We want to take care of problems before they start."

Some of the hospital's other amenities include multiple examination rooms, consultation and isolation rooms and separate wards for cat and dog patients.

"Having separate wards is different from most hospitals," said Jewett, adding that because of space, often times animals are combined into one room. "But, we are concerned about the welfare of the animals and what's good for them. Cats don't want to be next to dogs barking all day long."

Jewett also offers grooming and boarding, however she said those services are mainly for already established clients because she wants the center to primarily act as a hospital.

"I felt a facility like this is something that was needed," she said. "This area really needs to step up. There are several good animal hospitals, but I think the quality of care is only slowly getting better."

From pot belly pigs to exotic wildlife, Jewett said they will see "pretty much anything" that comes through the hospital doors. Jewett said they also work with wildlife rehabilitators to help injured animals in the community. The hospital recently treated a fawn and a great horned owl.

"At this point, I think we are the only hospital that dives into helping the wildlife. ... It is our little gift back to the community," Jewett said, adding that wildlife should be brought in only if it is physically injured. Sometimes people act too soon,



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(From left) Michelle Henry, Brooke Leicht and veterinarian Helen Jewett work on cleaning Scruffles' teeth at Hartwood Animal Hospital in Stafford on Tuesday.

she said, bringing in creatures like baby birds that may be on the ground solely because they are learning to fly.

Whether she is treating injured wildlife or a family pet, Jewett said she loves improving an animal's life and informing owners about what is best for their pet.

"Whether it's sad or positive, I enjoy being able to help animals and be a spokesperson for them and their quality of life," Jewett said. "The biggest reward from this job is being able to help my patients."

While she enjoys helping, Jewett said the hardest part is dealing with clients who may not have the money to properly care for their animal.

"What's not taught at school are life realities and financial problems," she said. "Sometimes people can't afford what needs to be done to help their pet — those are the hard cases."

Jewett operates the hospital with the help of five staff members, a high school student, her husband Dave Jewett and her father Alfred Jewett.

"We're an all-female staff so my dad helps keep us in line," Helen Jewett said, adding that the two worked together at a hospital in Woodbridge.

Caring for animals does not stop when Jewett leaves the hospital each day, she said. With a fish tank filled with "Nemo and his crew," a stallion, two pythons, a cockatoo, turtles and multiple dogs, Jewett said she "keeps a zoo" in her own home.

"My family loves animals," Jewett said about her husband and two children. "My son is the reptile fanatic and my daughter loves dogs. They both help with chores and she's been helping since the age of three. I say she's the next generation vet."

Jewett said as of now she sees no end to her career with animals and plans to keep helping her patients and maintaining her own animal family at home.

"I just love it," Jewett said. "The day I wake up and don't like work, that's the day I will stop practicing medicine."