

Vet flies long distance to operate remote clinic

Rufus the kitten inspired a Langley veterinarian to visit the B.C. Central Coast for a special mission.

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A plane ride in to the remote First Nations reserve of Oweekeno might have been a little unnerving, but the Langley vet who made the journey has no regrets.

Small Creatures Pet Clinic owner Dr. Jim Snyder was part of an eight-member team parachuted in last month to the B.C. Central Coast village only accessible by float plane or barge.

Their job: to spay and neuter as many of the dogs and cats as possible in the 250-person village during the three-day clinic, and to provide examinations and other basic veterinarian care to the furry domestic companions.

So how did the 53-year-old Walnut Grove vet become involved in such an undertaking?

Snyder blames it all on Rufus, an eight-month-old orange kitten he adopted from CARES about four months back.

Snyder was trying to find a caring home for a black stray that had begun hanging around his clinic at 88th Avenue and 212th Street.

Turned on to CARES, he explained how he had thought of adopting the cat, but elaborated that he had his heart set on an orange kitten.

They told him a baby fitting that description had just been pulled out of Bella Bella by the Big Heart Rescue, a registered non-profit society working with companion animals in remote First Nations communities.



CREDIT:

Dr. Jim Snyder lands in Oweekeno with a team of seven other people to provide the remote village with a three-day vet clinic.

The kitten was available for adoption.

That black cat has since found a new, loving home with one of his clinic staff. And Rufus, that little orange kitten, is now a fixture in the Snyder household.

Rufus has found himself a very loving home, but has also become the fall guy for any of the projects Snyder finds himself embroiled in, which connect to Big Heart Rescue.

"That little cat has got me into more trouble and hard work," Snyder said, laughing. "I look at him, and blame him for everything. I often pick him up and say, 'You got me into this.'"

But all kidding aside, the local vet said he was honoured and excited to be part of first-ever British Columbia Veterinary Medical Association sanctioned remote vet clinic.

He's even tossing around the idea of joining the Big Heart board and participating in more travelling vet clinics.

Snyder played a key role in making this recent first remote, in-field clinic possible.

"Dr. Snyder was an integral part of the achievements in Oweekeno and without the countless hours of time he spent working on behalf of this exciting project we never would have been as successful as we were," said Gail Moerkerken, Big Heart president.

After many months of conference calls, meetings and organizing the logistics, the team flew in June 19, and flew back June 22, leaving the crew little time to see all the patients, Moerkerken said.

Snyder was one of two vets who made the trip, along with representatives from the Raincoast Conservation Foundation, the Summerlee Foundation, the Rural Animal Vet Services from the USA, the World Society for the Protection of Animals, and Big Heart Rescue.

"I was happy to do it," said Snyder, who effectively closed down his own practice for the duration of the journey, referring emergency clients to another vet while he was gone.

He's been a vet in Langley for the past 13 years and explained that these sterilization clinics, as they're dubbed, see vets go into reserves to perform spaying and neutering of cats and dogs and offer some basic wellness sessions for pet owners.

This time out, the team "sterilized" 16 animals and provided vaccinations, deworming, defleaing, and minor wound care to 24 pets.

They worked in a makeshift clinic set up inside the community day care centre, Snyder explained.

The dining room was converted into a surgical room where Dr. Michael Paul, of the North Island Vet Clinic, performed most of the operations.

The living room was turned into a recovery and anesthetic room. The kitchen did triple duty as the sterilization space for surgical tools, a pharmacy, and the scrub in centre for the team.

And the larger bedroom and front porch became Snyder's examination rooms, while the second bedroom was storage space for the nine totes and 15 cardboard boxes of drugs and supplies that Snyder brought to aid in the animal care.

"It was an eye opener," said the Langley vet. "It was a really good case of getting you to think outside your box... it was a real worthwhile project."

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