

Veterinarian hits the road



Irene Dorst (left) looks anxiously as veterinarian Dr. Lara Sylvester trims the nails of her cat Benji in Prince Edward County on Feb. 2.

Photos and Story by Annie Sakkab

Compassion, care and accessibility are mobile veterinarian Lara Sylvester's three main keys to success.

After 12 years in a traditional practice, Sylvester said, she needed to come up with an alternative to increase comfort and accessibility to care for pets and pet owners.

Six months ago, Sylvester Veterinary House-call Services was born and it has been growing exponentially ever since.

For Sylvester, having a mobile practice allows her to spend more time with and be closer to her clients. She is the kind of person who loves to be around people and pets, and that allowed her business to grow naturally.

"It's amazing – I thought it would only be seniors who would use my services, but it's everybody," Sylvester explained.

Her clients are not only seniors and busy families, but also people with mobility or disability issues, or pets who can't be transported.

"I can't take my dog to the vet on my own because I can't hold her, she's too strong. So this is wonderful, it's less stressful for the dog," the owner of Harper the dog Brenda Daniels explains.

For Sylvester, growing her practice is not about growing her business. It's about compassion.

"I had this pet owner who couldn't treat her dog's ears, so I went to her house every single

day for two weeks, because that's what was needed. It wasn't about strategy or business: it was about helping someone. That's why I do what I do."

Other than x-rays or major surgeries where a general anesthetic is required, or hospitalization, Sylvester is able to do everything else at the pet owners' homes. She is able to perform minor surgeries with a sedative or local anesthetic, vaccinations, medication supply and monitoring and checkups.

"I have pretty much everything in my van ... oxygen, microscope, slides, food, medication, nail trimmers. Everything a normal practice would have except a surgical suite and an x-ray machine."

For major surgeries, she will pick up the pet if required, and performs the surgery in one of her two base hospitals in Belleville.

For pets and pet owners it's a much more enjoyable experience having a house call veterinarian come to where they are.

"Lucie is a lot more relaxed, she normally has a hard time going to the vet clinic. It's just nice having Dr. Sylvester come here and take care of her. I find it a lot more convenient," Christie Goodwin admits.

Sylvester serves the area from Marysville, north to Tweed and Stirling, west to Bayside and south to Prince Edward County.

"I've always felt if I take care of people and their pets, everything else will fall into place, and it does because I'm run-off-my-feet busy," Sylvester said.



Sylvester makes a housecall to Dorst in Prince Edward County. "I want to be happy and I want to make a difference. That's where I want to be in my life, and right now, I'm moving in that direction," says Sylvester.



(Above) "The whole key of a mobile practice in my opinion is having the pet comfortable. Going into the home provides that comfort."

(Above, right) Sylvester gets a shot ready while making an animal house call for Tami Turner in Belleville. "The most important thing for me is that people know I want to do it because I want to help."

(Right) Sylvester makes a regular check-up for Rebecca Dewey and Pearl the collie dog in Belleville. She mainly treats cats and dogs and offers non-emergency services including vaccinations, minor surgeries with sedative, general check-ups, nail trimming and medication supply in the Quinte area and neighbouring towns.

