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April 15, 2008

Saving the sight of service dogs

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The American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists and Pet Health Systems are launching the ACVO National Service Dog Eye Exam event the week of May 12. This event, whose primary sponsor is Merial, will provide free eye examinations and preventive health reports for thousands of service dogs.

More than 140 board-certified veterinary ophthalmologists have committed themselves to working with primary care veterinarians across the country and in parts of Canada to screen guide dogs, handicap-assistance dogs, detection dogs, and search-and-rescue dogs that are certified through a formal training program or organization.

The event will also serve to publicly promote the relationship between primary care veterinarians and veterinary specialists, strengthening the cross-referral process between these providers.

The ACVO is calling on primary care veterinarians to invite their clients who work with or own service dogs to register for the ACVO National Service Dog Eye Exam. Clients must register at www.ACVOeyeexam.org, where they will complete a form and locate a participating ophthalmologist to contact for an appointment. Merial and the ACVO will contact the registered pet owner's primary care veterinarian in advance to explain the program.



After the free ophthalmology examination, the owner will be referred back to their primary care veterinarian, who will use materials provided by PHS to collect a blood sample during the dog's next regular appointment and submit it for a free lifestyle assessment, biochemical profile, and CBC.

Through their primary care veterinarian, the client will receive a Pet Wellness Report (preventive health assessment) and blood panel sponsored by Pet Health Systems. PHS developed and maintains a site where the pet owner can register and receive their veterinarian's privately labeled Pet Wellness Report. This report serves as an outreach program for the veterinarian's practice and enables communication with the owner regarding their pet's risks for certain diseases and problems, based on its lifestyle. Included in the Pet Wellness Report will be a copy of the patient's laboratory results.

The ACVO decided to offer this program following the success of a local event hosted by a Memphis veterinary ophthalmologist, Dr. Bill Miller, who examined 87 service dogs. He said, "These dogs need and deserve superlative care. While most dogs examined that fine December day left happily with no detectable

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abnormalities, several dogs were treated, and one very special service dog named Quest, a (guide) dog owned by blind veteran Ron McKenney, solidified my commitment to this cause. In May, thousands of dogs will be screened. The potential for helping and healing is staggering."

An ocular tumor was diagnosed in Quest. Dr. Miller and Dr. Kathy Mitchener, a veterinary oncologist, are partnering to try and save Quest's sight. McKenney said, "If the ACVO Eye Exam Event can help my dog and give him a chance at beating this disease before it gets too advanced, just think what it can do for the hundreds, if not thousands of service dogs that will be able to participate in the nationwide event."

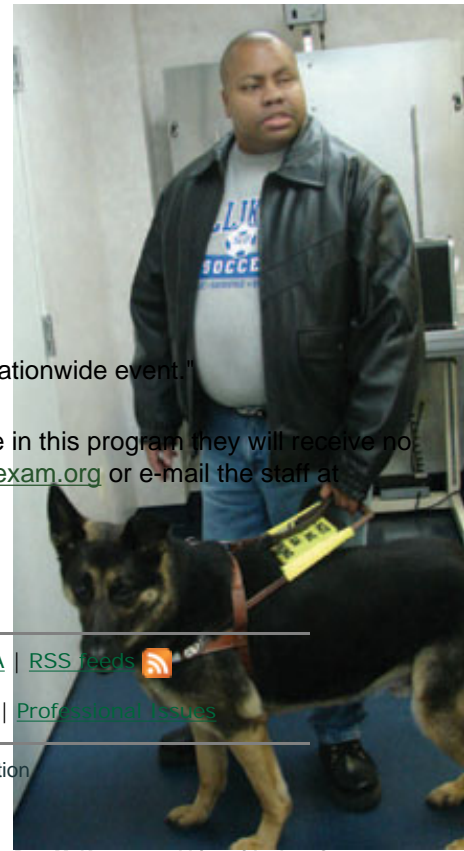
Stacey Daniel, ACVO director, assures veterinarians who participate in this program they will receive no commercial solicitations. For more information, visit www.ACVOeyeexam.org or e-mail the staff at office08@acvo.org.

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Ron McKenney and his guide dog, Quest