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ng Spots: Vets To Check Dogs' Sight

By ANGELA DELGADO

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The Tampa Tribune

Published: May 16, 2008

EGYPT LAKE - Those who handle or own service dogs depend upon them heavily, especially for the dogs' eyesight.

This is why the Florida Veterinary Specialists & Cancer Treatment Center is taking part in the first American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists' National Service Dog Eye Exam event.

The event is free, and more than 140 veterinary ophthalmologists and 1,300 general veterinarians will take part nationwide, according to a news release.

Florida Veterinary is providing the exams twice: on May 23 at its Tampa office at 3000 Busch Lake Blvd. and May 20 at its Clearwater office at 4525 Ulmerton Road.

The eye screenings are for guide dogs, disability assistance dogs, detention dogs, and search and rescue dogs, the release stated. The dogs must be working dogs.

"I'm really pleased we're able to offer it to these dogs," said Noelle McNabb, veterinary ophthalmologist at Florida Veterinary. "I jumped at the chance."

Since McNabb is a specialist, she rarely has the opportunity to catch an eye defect or illness first. She generally sees the dogs after a general veterinarian has found a problem and begun treating it.

"What this day allows us to do is it gives us a chance to provide early detection," McNabb said.

"We're well-versed in detecting eye disease in purebred dogs."

Service dogs usually tend to be German shepherds, Labrador retrievers and

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golden retrievers.

The early detection could keep a dog in the service field. Otherwise, if an ailment is caught late, the dog has to receive extensive treatment and is usually taken out of service, McNabb said.

McNabb also said the day will allow her to instruct the dog handlers on what is normal for their dog's eyes and what they should look out for.

Florida Veterinary is providing the full eye exam, which usually costs \$95, for free. McNabb said she'll be looking at the cornea, conjunctiva, pupil, iris and lens. She'll also look for signs of cataracts.

Healthy dogs should have a full eye exam once a year, she said.

Anyone interested must call Florida Veterinary at (813) 933-8944 to set up an appointment.

Reporter Angela Delgado can be reached at adelgado@tampatrib.com or (813) 865-1501.



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