

OSU clinic offers free eye tests for service dogs

Purebreds often have more problems

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THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Holding one hand over the dog's right eye, the veterinarian jabbed her fist toward the left.

A rapid series of blinks let the doctor know that the left eye worked.

That crude experiment is the first of several ways in which animal ophthalmologists determine whether a dog's eyes are functioning properly.

"We obviously can't use an eye chart," Dr. Anne Gemensky Metzler said with a laugh as she demonstrated a canine eye exam on Fender, a willing German shepherd, last week at the Ohio State Veterinary Medical Center.

Today, Metzler and animal ophthalmologist Dr. David Wilkie will offer free eye examinations for service dogs as part of a national program sponsored in part by the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists. The local exams, which normally cost \$121, also will be offered on Wednesday and May 17 and May 24 at the OSU center, 601 Vernon Sharp St.

"Since many (service dogs) are purebreds, they can have more problems," which could benefit from early treatment, Metzler said.

Last year was the first time OSU participated in the program, and 12 service dogs were checked. Nearly all had minor vision problems, and one had retinal degeneration that doctors are watching, said vet technician Kelley Norris.

But none had to stop being a service dog, Norris said.

Conditions such as dry eyes and cataracts are treatable if caught early, Metzler said. Eye problems also can indicate other health issues.

Metzler quizzes owners about their dogs' habits: Does the dog bump into things? Are the dog's eyes red or cloudy? Is it squinting?

She checks for glaucoma with an instrument that measures eye pressure, much like the "puff" test given to humans. She beams a light into the dog's eyes to check for symmetry and examines the eyelids and cornea.



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Dr. Anne Gemensky Metzler checks Fender's eyes while veterinary technician Kelley Norris keeps him still during an examination in the Ohio State Veterinary Medical Center. Metzler found retinal degeneration in the service dog's left eye.

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