

Wild eyed
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Loveland animal ophthalmologist has treated everything from rhinos to Fidos

Just after Christmas, Chloe's eye pressure reached a dangerous level when her glaucoma was no longer being controlled by eye drops.

Luckily for the Jack Russell terrier, she had three advantages that helped her save her sight: a local animal eye specialist, an experimental treatment and a doting owner.

Lynn Kelly, the dog's owner, sought treatment for Chloe at the Animal Eye Center in Loveland, which is owned by veterinarian and animal ophthalmologist Steve Roberts.

Roberts opened the center in 1998 in Fort Collins, and moved to the Loveland location, 215 W. 67th Court, in 2000.

Most recently, Roberts is the primary investigator for a trial animal glaucoma implant, which he used to treat Chloe.

She was the third dog to receive the treatment, which allowed her to maintain vision in her left eye.

"At the Animal Eye Center, with all the staff and Dr. Roberts in particular, there was compassion and knowledge," Kelly said. "A lot of thought went into the best way to treat Chloe."

The implant, called the ClarifEye, was developed by Craig Woods' company TR BioSurvival in Prescott, Ariz.

Roberts' Practice

At his clinic, Roberts, along with another animal ophthalmologist, Holly Hamilton, diagnoses and treats eye disorders and performs state-of-the-art surgeries.

Roberts was an assistant and associate professor of ophthalmology at North Carolina State University and Colorado State University.

□ When he worked in North Carolina, he treated "difficult to handle" zoo animals, such as rhinos, walruses and woolly monkeys.

Now he still treats large animals such as horses and bulls, as well as birds and exotic mammals, Roberts said.

While he is not in a formal educational setting any longer, he still treats his patients' owners like tuition-paying students.



"They hired me, and I need to give them an education," Roberts said.

His specialty needs a population of about 1 million people to sustain it, so Roberts serves clients in Wyoming, Montana, South Dakota, Utah, New Mexico and Idaho, he said.

There are other animal ophthalmologists in Denver, but for Northern Colorado, "I'm it," Roberts said.

He estimates he's served about 20,000 clients and 27,000 animals in 10 years.

Treating animals' eyes can be difficult, because unlike humans, animals cannot voice their discomfort, which can lead to late diagnoses.

"We are not so good at reading nonverbal clues," Roberts said. "We get so wrapped up in our own world."

By the time many pet owners realize their animals are having vision problems, the issue is already severe.

"There is a narrow window to help them," Roberts said.

Canine Glaucoma

Glaucoma is a disease of the optic nerve, typically caused by increased pressure on the eye.

There are about 40 breeds of dogs that are prone to glaucoma, Roberts said.

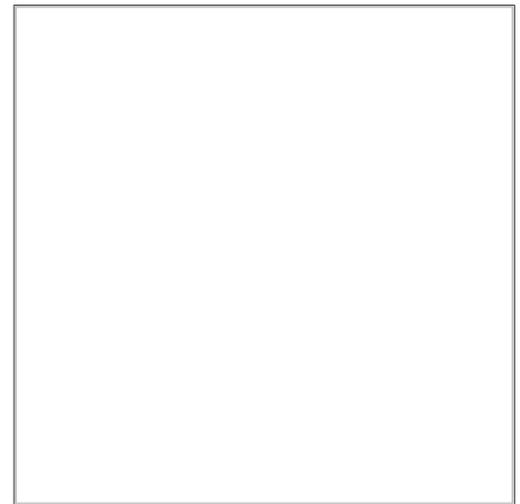
Unlike most human cures, which are developed on animals first, animal glaucoma treatments have evolved from human cures, Roberts said.

Most treatment devices on the market have "pretty much failed to control glaucoma," and still result in the eye being removed. However, the ClarifEye has appeared to be very functional, said Woods, who developed the implant.

The ClarifEye, which is shaped like a milk bottle and made of silicon beads, is surgically inserted into a dog's eye to drain excess fluid so the eye maintains appropriate pressure, Woods said.

It is in limited trials, and Roberts is pioneering the technique on the implant, Woods said. He hopes the implant will be launched under limited conditions next year.

Kelly wanted Chloe, who was already blind in her right eye, to have the surgery, because "she didn't have anything to lose," she said.



Dr. Steve Roberts puts an ointment into the eye of Beau as veterinary technician Michele Lohry steadies the dog Monday at the Animal Eye Center in Loveland. Dr. Roberts began using a new technique of implanting a small device into the eyes of animals to help them with glaucoma. Reporter-Herald/Christopher Stark

Signs a pet needs an eye exam

- Thick discharge has been present on the eyelids for several days
- The eye appears cloudy
- Eye pain is present, there is squinting, rubbing at face area, tear spillage on the face
- White portion of eye is bloodshot
- Vision seems decreased

Source: Animal Eye Center

Chloe was a good candidate for the trial treatment, because the veterinarians could study the implant's effects on a totally blind eye and a semi-healthy eye.

After surgery, Chloe has maintained vision in her left eye, and relieved the pressure from the right eye.

"Chloe is making wonderful progress, far better than we initially anticipated," Woods said.

Before Chloe had the surgery, Kelly was administering expensive eyedrops twice a day that cost \$80 for a tiny bottle, Kelly said.

Now, Chloe takes a diluted version of the drops just once a day Kelly said.

Kelly estimates she has spent about \$2,000 on all of Chloe's treatments and surgery, but Roberts and Woods have "bent over backwards" trying to help her save money.

"Most people wouldn't have done this for their dogs, but they are my family" Kelly said. "I didn't think twice about it. I feel good that (Chloe's) data from the study will help other dogs in the future."

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