

“He’s part of the family”



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Riddle sometimes gets so excited about a high five he goes at it with both paws. “You going to give me two paws? Good Boy,” says his owner Karl Lintz.

At seven, this Springer spaniel has the energy of a puppy. Yet like his name Riddle’s past is a bit of a puzzle. “He has obviously been hit by a vehicle and left unattended,” says Linda Lintz.

By the time the Lintz’s adopted Riddle his [bones](#) had healed at odd angles. His left [rear leg](#) could not be saved. Damage to his other [hip](#) and knee made simple walking painful. And both is front paws

are turned in at the elbow and inflamed with [arthritis](#).

“He’s a family member so we would do anything to help him be more mobile,” says Karl Lintz.

“He’s really an [orthopedic](#) train wreck,” says Dr. Justin Greco.

Dr. Greco is a [veterinarian](#) who also happens to be an orthopedic specialist. After examining Riddle he recommended a stem cell injection – a procedure to inject stem cells that are taken from the dog’s own fat- to ease inflammation.

“They can basically form into any kind of tissue. (Stem Cells) have a lot of triggers that will turn those stem cells into skin bone or tendon depending on the area that it is placed into,” he explains.

Stem Cells, hip replacements, even transplants. Specialty surgical procedures once reserved for people are now available here in Rochester for their pets.

“I think everyone has a responsibility to care for their animals,” says Steve Hockley who sits at the vet’s office with his dog Bobby on his lap. Bobby’s eyes don’t follow movements in the room.

He is a ten year old Pekinese. The way his cloudy eyes see the world make him much older.

“When was the last time he could see you,” I asked Mr. Hockley. He replies “that would have been at least 4 years ago. The site thing has been progressive but it’s to the point right now where he can't see at all.”

Yet when Bobby is hooked up to a computer measuring device and his responses to flashes of light are measured it’s clear that behind the dog’s cataract covered lenses, the retinas are good.

That makes him a good candidate for surgery.

"Beep, beep" go heart monitors. You can also hear the sound of a breathing machine rise and fall. We are in an operating room with Bobby who is on the table.

Dr. Kent Burgesser drapes the dog’s head and exposes first one eye, then the other. Using tiny instruments and a microscope he scrapes away the cataract and fits artificial lenses into each of the dog’s eyes.

“These dogs are often very timid when they're blind - they're not navigating their homes well - they're not active at play,” explains Dr. Burgesser about the impact sight has on a dog’s behavior and quality of life. “Frequently the difference in that patient's behavior and their attitudes are different as soon as they come out of the anesthesia.”

While people may choose to do without when it comes to their own health they are not willing to do the same when it comes to their pets – even in a recession. Last year pet owners spent \$ 4.3 billion on specialty [medical treatments](#), a number that is expected to increase 10 percent this year.

Springer Spaniel Riddle has had three surgeries and a stem cell treatment – all adding up to a cost of \$12-thousand dollars. But with the medical help, he is walking- even running – without the use of a harness.

“He can climb up stairs with our guidance and go down stairs,” says Karl Lintz. Asked about the expense he says “if we had a child we would certainly spend the money so this is really no different. We can justify it easily.”

"We wanted to give him the best opportunity to have a few more happy years,” says his wife, Linda adding that if there had not been progress they would not have continued with treatments. “There’s only so much you can put an animal through.”

As for Bobby, the Pekinese – he arrived at the vet blind. Later the same day he leaves able to see. The cloudy haze that stole his [vision](#) is gone when he wakes from anesthesia.

"I think he's going to have a good summer now,” says owner Steve Hockley who drove here from Kingston, Ontario in Canada for the surgery. “He's obviously going to be able to see the grass and the trees.”

Bobby can't tell us what it's like but for the first time all day he is turning his head back and forth following the action in the room. He lets out a few excited barks, and his tail is moving back and forth.