

# Doug's healing ways: Cat earns top title

By Rachel Kirkpatrick

It's a quiet afternoon at Georgetown Veterinary Hospital, and basking in a warm line of sunshine is a striking silver short-haired cat who instantaneously gets up and struts to the end of the counter. Doug, an office cat there, has come a long way from his days of foraging for food on the streets of Jamaica Queens, N.Y. Though it took him a few years to become adjusted to human contact, he is now a greeter, mouse-catcher and friend to many pet owners and their patients — he's a hero, too.

When a cat named Misty, suffering from anemia because of kidney failure, was taken to the hospital, it was Doug's donated blood that saved her. His donation, and his friendly demeanor in the office, earned him the title of the 2008 Pet of the Year from the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association.

Carol Gamez, DVM, who co-owns Georgetown Veterinary Hospital with Stanley Truffini, DVM, said the transfusion had no guarantee, but in a day, Misty was doing better.

Blood that is not typed can be donated to another cat only once. Generally, when cats are critical they are sent to a critical care facility where there is artificial blood, which is expensive, said Carol Truffini, the office manager at the hospital.

After he awoke, Dr. Gamez bought Doug a new bowl, a new collar, a new bed and new toys.

"He was spoiled tremendously, to the point that he gained weight; he got so many treats," Ms. Truffini said.

"This cat (Misty) is alive one year later, and is doing well," she said. Misty and Doug look exactly like, she said. "We felt it was something cosmic there."

"He is often wonderful with people who have had sad experiences," Ms. Truffini said. "He lets them pet him, he will put his face in their face; many people



Doug, an office cat at Georgetown Veterinary Hospital, was recently named Pet of the Year. Behind him is Lucy, the other office cat, and receptionist Suezy Partelow.

(Rachel Kirkpatrick photo)

have cried into his fur."

Doug's life began as a stray in the neighborhood where Ms. Truffini's mother lived. He was named Doug after the character from the hit sitcom *The King of Queens*.

"He was hanging around, and she was feeding him," Ms. Truffini said. "She just felt bad for him. We were able to trap him with food; he loves food."

The office already had a rescued cat at the office, who took Doug under her wing.

"She took him in as if he was this enormous kitten. He sort of linked up with her, like 'Hey,

there is someone like me here,'" Ms. Truffini recalled. "It's really because of her that he came around."

One year later the office got another cat from the same neighborhood, whom they named Lucy after St. Lucy, the patron saint of eyes, because she had a terrible eye infection.

"So Doug and Lucy hang out there; they have the run of the hospital," Ms. Truffini said. "They're so comical, they make people feel good."

Last summer when the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association sent a notice looking

for outstanding pets, the office decided to enter Doug.

"Lo and behold in November, we got notification that out of all the entries in Connecticut, Doug had won," Ms. Truffini said. "We were just amazed."

During an award banquet at a convention of the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association last week, Doug was honored alongside Veterinarian of the Year, Dr. Arnold Goldman of Canton Animal Hospital. Also honored that evening was Lt. William Kerr of the Hartford Fire Department, who used new oxygen masks for animals to help save a family's dog after their house was destroyed in a fire. Rep. Kevin Witkos (R-Avon and Canton) was also honored for his work on a piece of legislation that helped establish emergency plans for pets.

"We look for animals that exemplify the human-animal bond, or who have made outstanding contributions to veterinary medicine," said Nancy Klaffsky, associate director of the association.

"Obviously Doug was demonstrating this by his greeting and consoling of people at the hospital — he certainly exemplifies the human-animal bond and his contribution has been to save lives," Ms. Klaffsky said.

Past Pet of the Year honors have been awarded to the Hartford Hospital Pet Therapy Program, and to a dog who's battle with melanoma helped spur the development of significant new vaccines to treat the aggressive cancer in both dogs and people. "This was also such a great opportunity to demonstrate that animals also need blood donations for transfusions," Ms. Klaffsky said of Doug's story. "It just makes you feel good."

"He's got a great personality; he just sort of understands people," Ms. Truffini said. "He's come a long way, and he's found his niche."