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[Monday, Jun 5, 2017](#)

[Saturday, Jun 3, 2017](#)

[Friday, Jun 2, 2017](#)

[Thursday, Jun 1, 2017](#)

[Wednesday, May 31, 2017](#)

[← Back](#)

Go to date:

Go

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Go

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[Friday, Jun 2, 2017](#)

[Thursday, Jun 1, 2017](#)

[Wednesday, May 31, 2017](#)

[Tuesday, May 30, 2017](#)

[Monday, May 29, 2017](#)

[← Back](#) | [Forward →](#)

Go to date:

Go

Search Records:

Go

Public Notices

[Monday, Jun 5, 2017](#)

[Sunday, Jun 4, 2017](#)

[Saturday, Jun 3, 2017](#)

[Friday, Jun 2, 2017](#)

[Thursday, Jun 1, 2017](#)

[← Back](#)

Go to date:

Go

Search Notices:

Go

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Morningstar 11:41 EST



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Symbol	Chg	Chg%	Last
Morningstar	-9.86	-0.16%	6,115.11
Small Cap	-40.21	-0.45%	8,898.59
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Veterinary Ophthalmologists Providing Free Eye Exams for Service Animals

BY MARIA ZOCCOLA Special to The Daily News

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Each May, the offices of Memphis Veterinary Services begin to fill up with a very special group of clients: service animals. The eye exams are offered at no charge through the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmology/Stokes Pharmacy National Service Animal Eye Exam event, and are available to a variety of different registered service animals.



Memphis Veterinary Specialists in Cordova will offer free eye exams for service animals throughout May. (Daily News/Alan Howell)



2/3



Veterinary ophthalmologists across the country participate in the event, and in Memphis, Dr. [Bill Miller](#) and Dr. [Jane Ashley Huey](#) have their hands full.

“We see guide dogs for folks that have vision loss, diabetic assistance dogs, personal assistance dogs, hearing dogs, seizure detection dogs, the police dogs that ride around with the officers, drug detection dogs, explosives detection dogs, accelerant detection dogs, forensic dogs that find people after an accident, cadaver dogs, search and rescue dogs, and that’s just the ones that I can think of off the top of my head,” Miller said.

But not all of the service animals that participate in the program are dogs.

“We have done a few police horses as well,” Miller said.

Prospective clients register their animals on the ACVO/StokesRx website and then schedule a visit with Memphis Veterinary Services. Miller and Huey also see animals at their offices in Little Rock , Arkansas, and Jackson, Mississippi.

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The official, nationwide program seems to be the natural evolution of standard veterinary practices.

“Veterinary ophthalmologists across the country have always pretty much to a person provided free eye exams to service dogs, and yet it wasn’t well known to the service dog community. We decided to have a national eye exam day for these service dogs to make it more visible to the community,” Miller said.

Huey stresses the importance of the yearly eye exam for service animals.

“There are certain ocular diseases that develop later in life, so things could change between one exam to the next,” Huey said. “Some are inherited and some are infectious or inflammatory conditions that could potentially affect the dog’s ability to do its job.”

In some cases, human safety may be dependent on a service animal’s eyesight.

“If you’re sending these dogs into very hazardous environments, without their eyesight they couldn’t go in there and find individuals who may be trapped,” Miller said. “And for our police dogs, that officer is dependent on that dog as his partner. If his partner can’t see the bad guy, then that policeman’s life is at risk.”

Good eyesight may be necessary for all service animals, but for seeing-eye dogs, perfect vision is vital to the safety of their handlers. This is a reality that hits especially close to home for Huey, who adopted a seeing-eye dog after cataracts impeded the dog’s vision beyond what the dog’s handler could manage.

“The lady noticed that the dog was becoming more hesitant in certain situations and having a little more difficulty than what she was used to,” Huey explained. “She told me, ‘Well, her eyes are my eyes, and her eyes are what keeps us both safe.’”

The May free eye exam event has become a staple in the Memphis service animal community. The program is also open to therapy dogs. Mary Ehrhart, executive director of Mid-South Therapy Dogs, says that her organization is very familiar with the program.

“Some of our teams go ahead and they take advantage of the free service to have the eye exam. One of the reasons that they do that is because it comes from a reputable organization,” Ehrhart said.

Miller has been practicing in ophthalmology for nearly 30 years. He was drawn to the profession in part because of the difficulties associated with treatment of the eye.

“I like the fact that an incision a tenth of a millimeter off can be the difference between success and failure. I kind of like that challenge,” Miller said.

Huey, too, felt drawn to working in ophthalmology. She has been practicing since 2014.

“The eye is one of the most beautiful structures I’ve ever seen, especially

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RECORD TOTALS	DAY	WEEK	YEAR
PROPERTY SALES	137	137	8,905
MORTGAGES	138	138	10,468
FORECLOSURE NOTICES	0	0	0
BUILDING PERMITS	179	179	19,073
BANKRUPTCIES	63	63	6,281
BUSINESS LICENSES	21	21	3,242
UTILITY CONNECTIONS	89	89	6,923
MARRIAGE LICENSES	39	39	2,252

Through the Lens



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an animal's eye, because they've got this reflective structure in the back of their eye. It's one of the few places where you can see nerves and vessels, compared to the rest of the body where they're under skin," Huey said.

A serious problem developing in a service animal's eye is not a regular occurrence. But when disaster does strike, Miller stresses that early detection may make all the difference.

"It's rare, but we're talking about people's lives that are dependent on dogs. If you save one, it's probably worth it," Miller said.

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