

LIFE notes

LIFE prides itself on helping those in need and for being the champion for those who cannot speak but who enrich our lives and everyday make us a little more... human.

Issue 53 November 20, 2018

Thanksgiving Edition



Upcoming events

Giving Thanks

This Month I am Thankful For:

As I reflect during this month of giving thanks, I am reminded of the many things I have to be grateful for.

The November 11th PBS airing Debt of Honor, shining a light on the plight of Veterans in America.

The upcoming dedication of the Lois Pope Center for Retinal & Macular Degeneration Research

The honor being presented with the Lifetime Achievement President's Award on National Philanthropy

The birthday of my daughter, Maria Pope Kessel who was born on Thanksgiving Day!

All of the wonderful supporters of LIFE who have made it all possible.

I thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

Wednesday, December 19, 2018

Pre-Gala Reception

Hosted by Jan and Chip Malley

at the Club Colette

By Invitation

Friday, January 4, 2019

LIFE's 25th Silver Jubilee

Lady in Red Gala

The Breakers, Palm Beach

6:00 PM

To learn more or to donate, visit
www.life-edu.org or call 561.582.8083.

Dear Friends,

Dogs have a long history of military service, dating back to ancient times. Here in the U.S., canines have been used as scouts and trackers and to guard prisoners and deliver messages on the front lines since the Civil War. More recently in Iraq and Afghanistan, these four-legged heroes have employed their remarkable sense of smell to sniff out improvised explosive devices and weapons caches. In fact, these incredible dogs have given us their best. They have put their own lives on the line to protect and defend us.

So it is at once shocking and inconceivable that the front lines may be safer for dogs than the medical center laboratories of the Veterans Administration. Indeed, the Department of Veterans Affairs – still striving to recover from massive scandals involving its (mis)treatment of human patients – is now becoming embroiled in another controversy, this one involving its (mis)treatment of canines.

News reports published in recent weeks found that the VA is continuing to conduct invasive experiments on dogs as part of its medical research program, experiments that result in the euthanasia of the animals. According to the reports, there are currently nine active experiments at four VA facilities, including in Milwaukee, where researchers are removing parts of the dogs' brains to test neurons that control breathing prior to killing them by lethal injection, and in Cleveland, where doctors are measuring dogs' cough reflexes by placing electrodes on their spinal cords. When done, the cords are severed, killing the dogs.

Sadly, the VA is not alone in using dogs in the name of scientific research. Just as other institutions have defended this practice as critical to medical breakthroughs, officials at the VA maintain that their canine experiments are ethically sound and can lead to discoveries that can positively impact veterans suffering from paralysis, heart ailments and breathing problems. They cite prior studies on dogs that resulted in the invention of an implantable cardiac pacemaker and procedures that led to the first successful liver transplant.

But that argument holds less water than what fits into a Yorkie's bowl, because according to the VA's own website, those discoveries date back more than a half-century to the 1960s.

In an act of compassion, the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation last year to defund the VA's canine experimentation program, but the measure stalled in the Senate. Nevertheless, earlier this year a federal bill was passed that requires the Secretary of Veteran Affairs to first grant approval before any funding can be allocated to this research. And just prior to his dismissal, Dr. David Shulkin, the then VA Secretary, issued a moratorium on any new experiments moving forward without permission and that all ongoing studies had to go through a formal review process by VA research leadership.

But these barriers haven't precluded or impeded the VA from conducting what may be painful and is definitely fatal research on dogs.

Please know that we are not advocating that all research be prohibited, because as one of us (Lois Pope) has learned from producing a new documentary, "Made for Each Other," with award-winning filmmaker Ric Burns, there are enormously important groundbreaking studies being conducted at Duke University, using fMRI technology to determine dogs' cognitive abilities, with the goal of improving the ways they are bred and trained to help humans as service and therapy dogs. Also, because dogs can get the same diseases as humans, scientists at Cornell University are using canine DNA to improve the effectiveness of new immunotherapy treatments for cancer. These are but two examples of dogs being used safely in research that could be beneficial to humans.

American Humane, the country's oldest national humane organization, is supportive of positive prevention studies designed to keep animals and people healthy, and advocating in any work it funds that no animals are harmed, there is no induction of illness or injury, and they are not euthanized.

It doesn't take a scientist to know that dogs can and do play an essential role in bettering the lives of all of us, and particularly our military and our veterans. Through our decades of activism and support of animals and disabled veterans alike, we have seen first-hand how dogs provide much needed assistance and therapy for veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. They also act as guide and service dogs for veterans who have been blinded or disabled in combat.

Working side-by-side with the men and women of our armed forces while putting their own lives on the line for our country, military dogs take loyalty to a whole new level through such service. By doing so, they have saved countless thousands of lives.

Now it's time that we do something to save their lives and those of all our four-footed friends by immediately stopping and banning all harmful VA research involving dogs. We know we're not barking up the wrong tree in saying that since dogs are our best friends, we can't be treating them like our enemies.

Love,

Lois

To learn more or to donate, visit
www.life-edu.org or call 561.582.8083.