

# Take a Paws

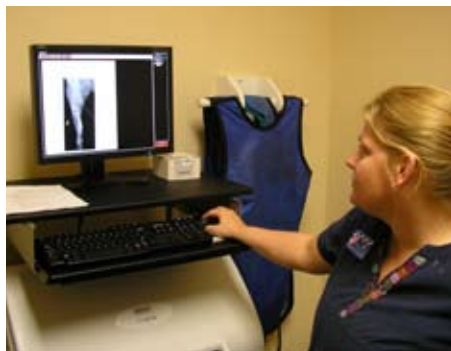
## Sit, Stay, Be Well

### Laser Surgery Isn't Just for Humans Anymore

By Bill Bedard

With recent advances in medicine, hospitals can sometimes seem more like something out of a science fiction movie than a place to get care. The same can hold true for veterinary hospitals. However, at PetDocks Veterinary Hospital in Morehead City, high tech meets high spirits to earn the designation of the “other family doctor.” Husband and wife team Dr. Allison Arnoult and Dr. Todd Worrell treat their veterinary patients with cutting edge technology, including laser surgery, new digital records, digital X-rays and even ultrasounds—alongside good old-fashioned care and concern.

Arnoult and Worrell started PetDocks in 2000, but quickly outgrew their original building. They built a state-of-the-art veterinary hospital in Morehead City and moved in February of 2007. The new facility is twice as large as the former building, and allowed them to incorporate the latest technologies in every part of the design. PetDocks boasts four computerized examination rooms, laser surgical procedure equipment, equipment for dental and full body digital X-rays, a full laboratory, an American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) standards pharmacy, a grooming room, isolation ward, surgery preparation area, separate boarding areas for dogs and cats, and even a separate area for smaller dogs. In addition, on PetDocks property there is dog obedience/socialization training available by a certified trainer, and an agility course along with a



Sunni Floyd checks a digital X-ray of a broken leg bone.

spacious play area.

With all of this equipment, PetDocks can perform anything from simple nail trimming, to elective procedures (such as spaying and neutering and cat declaws), to more advanced surgery (including orthopedic surgeries, surgical treatments for advanced ear diseases, thyroid disorders, and laser removal of skin growths).

The method of doing surgery makes PetDocks seem like science fiction—and able to provide superior care to the community. When Arnoult and Worrell started their practice in 2000, they decided to provide care incorporating the use of a surgical laser in their practice. Very recently upgraded with the latest equipment, the laser is not standard equipment in veterinary practice. Few hospitals offer laser procedures in the area. “They do offer them at larger cities, but they are just starting in private practices,” said Worrell.

A laser is more effective as a surgery aid than a scalpel because it heats the water in cells and causes them to burst in a very focused area. The laser also makes it easy to do procedures on even the thickest skin. “It’s like a hot knife through butter,” Worrell said.

Worrell said this “hot knife” is good for the animal, because it results in reduced bruising and disturbing the tissue around the area they are working. “There’s no collateral damage,” Arnoult added, saying that using a laser helps decrease bleeding, swelling, risk of infection, and usually means a faster recovery time. This recovery time is a bonus for any animal PetDocks treats, even animals from the humane society and other rescue groups.

Not all the technology is invasive for the patient. PetDocks is able to keep track of each patient they see with Electronic Medical Records from each exam room. They also employ ultrasound imaging that allows caregivers to visualize internal structures and organs which are impossible or difficult to see with traditional X-rays.



Dr. Todd Worrell and Brette Brooks perform laser surgery on Dozer, a dog who is having some painful and irritating backward-growing eyelashes removed.

Traditional X-rays have been given a big reboot with the new digital X-ray machines PetDocks uses for both dental and full body pictures. Digital X-ray was such an advance in technology the couple felt the practice needed to upgrade to digital dental in August 2008 and whole-body digital X-ray in November. The advantages were huge for the practice, according to Assistant Sunni Floyd. “[Digital X-ray] is the best purchase ever made in any clinic,” she said. “You only have to do the X-ray one time, not worrying about the focus and taking several, so it’s easier on the animals.”

It’s not only the technology that is upgraded at PetDocks. Employees also regularly get the latest education and training. There is one registered veterinary technician, but all the other employees receive training or have ample experience working in the field. “We’re big on education, and if they haven’t gone out for continuing education, we’re constantly [training personnel] here,” Arnoult said.

At the core of the training is the love of the animals that makes PetDocks so successful. “When your pet is here with us, the staff treats it as if it was their own pet,” Arnoult said.

As to the next technological step—Worrell said there was always new technology coming out. “We evaluate whether it will be a benefit for this area and we’ll add on new technologies as needed,” he said. ■