

# Arizona Daily Star

## Business

### Pet Hospital Tripling Its Size

By Marissa Hopkins

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Emergency blood transfusions, CT scans and cardiovascular surgery are typical hospital treatments, but at the Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson, the patients are pets.

Keeping up with the expanding demand for advanced medical care for pets, the Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson is in the process of an expansion that will triple its size. The expansion to 32,000 square feet will make the facility at 4909 N. La Canada Drive the largest vet specialty center in Arizona under one roof, said James Boulay, a surgeon and a founding owner of the center.

A veterinary specialty center works the same way for pets as hospitals work for people, Boulay said. The animals have their general veterinarian for vaccinations and checkups, but for surgeries and emergency care, the pets can be referred and brought to the specialty center.

Barbara Gores, the center's other co-founding owner and surgeon, said they made the decision to expand now because building costs are down amid the recession. She said they also felt that since they had planned on expanding eventually, it would be good to do it now to put money into the local economy. "We will have the ability to expand our services for years," Gores said.

Boulay said he doesn't feel that the veterinary services industry is suffering quite as much as other businesses. He said that even when times are tough, people are willing to spend money on quality care for their pets. "People will cut back on other things for their pets," Boulay said.

Bob Funk is a client who brought his cat, Louise, into the center Friday to have a tube inserted in her stomach so she could eat. "It costs money, but the cats are family, and you do what you need to do," Funk said about the costs of veterinary services for his five cats. "We couldn't live without them."

The expansion of the Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson is set to be complete by February. Boulay said the center will not be hiring any new employees as part of the expansion right away, but Gores said the owners are hoping to hire a fourth surgeon within a year or two. The Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson is the only specialty center in the area with surgeons and technicians on call 24 hours a day, Boulay said.

"When we're closed, our phone goes directly to them," said Valorie Lawson of the Ajo Veterinary Clinic.

Funk said he has used the center several times for special treatments and diagnostics, as well as in the middle of the night or when his regular vet is out of town.

The expanded center will include a solar-energy system, Boulay said. "It's crazy not to use solar power here," Boulay said. "I think everyone has a responsibility, and we're a 24-hour business." He said the goal is to meet 40 percent to 50 percent of the center's energy needs with solar power.



The center plans to get a new or refurbished magnetic resonance imaging machine, Boulay said. It will be Arizona's first pet MRI machine outside of Phoenix and only the second in the state, he said.

Though the Tucson center is expanding during tough economic times, the veterinary specialty industry has been growing recently as more advances are made in veterinary medicine, said Pam Stevenson, administrative director of the Veterinary Specialty Practice Alliance in Durham, N.C. Also, pet insurance has become more prevalent, helping owners pay for these new treatments, she said. "People have to choose sometimes whether or not they can treat their pets," Stevenson said. "Is (the tough economy) going to destroy the specialty industry? No. Is it making us tighten our belt a little? Yes."

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