

Stylish place for ailing pets

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The Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson stands out for its unique design — both inside and out. It was designed by Bill Stamm, a University of Arizona architecture professor, and constructed about two years ago. Last month the center won Veterinary Economics magazine's hospital design merit award.



photos by Chris Coduto / Arizona Daily Star

While the Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson isn't exactly posh, a first look says "spa" as much as it says "Spot."

The lobby has porcelain tile floors and composite quartz countertops. Framed artwork graces the walls, and sleek metal sconces echo the building's curvaceous design.

Look closer and you'll notice many of the doors have windows at eye level for humans — and knee-level for their pets.

Those design features helped the 10,000-square-foot hospital last month to win Veterinary Economics magazine's hospital design merit award.

Owners and veterinary surgeons Barbara Gores and James Boulay designed the hospital with University of Arizona architecture professor Bill Stamm, an architect for more than 30 years and the designer of more than 15 other animal hospitals.

"They try to tell us what they need and what they want, and we try to translate from a verbal language to a physical, environmental language," Stamm said.

The building was constructed in 2004.

The idea, Gores said, is to make people feel as welcome and comfortable as possible when they arrive at the hospital, 4909 N. La Cañada Drive.

"Frankly, most of our clients ... are coming here under a certain amount of duress," Gores said.

It was there that Miko, a Tucson Police Department service dog, was taken on May 28 after chasing a carjacking suspect who jumped from an overpass at Kino and Aviation parkways. Miko followed and took a 30-foot fall, breaking his back, shattering a leg and suffering neurological damage. Miko was euthanized.

Gores said her patients and their owners have to deal with sad situations. She wanted a facility that was technologically advanced but not simply sterile.

A metal dog sculpture, with a real tennis ball, greets visitors as they drive into the parking lot. "Cat people" will see an accompanying cat perched atop a rafter and looking down on the waiting room. One room, called the "comfort room," is decorated in blues and purples. Inside, people can look out a glass wall into a garden. Pet-themed art hangs on exam room walls.

The Veterinary Specialty Center, which does not handle routine animal checkups or vaccinations, is equipped to handle the most serious animal injuries. The hospital, centered around an intensive-care unit, features the latest technology.

"Crash carts" with heart defibrillators are on hand, and there's an oxygen chamber that can hold two small animals or one large one. Ultrasound equipment and a CT scanner are available at the 24-hour facility. Waiting room includes computer terminals from which doctors can pull up X-rays as well as patient records.

"The pets love it. They don't feel so trapped," Gores said of the pet-level door windows. "The staff loves it. You don't want to go bashing into your patient."

Stamm said it took more than a year and multiple meetings with the doctors to determine what the building would look like and how it would be designed.

Working on this building has been an important learning experience, Stamm said. When he won the same Veterinary Economics award in the mid-1990s for design of another hospital, he heard from several different vets from around the country who wanted him to design their facilities. He declined those long-distance offers because he felt the need to be close to his clients and to be able to show them renderings and models, and be available for feedback.

Now, because he uses more computer-generated renderings and e-mail, Stamm said he would consider working on long-distance projects.

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