

# Pet groomer takes dogs (and cats) to cleaners

## Baths, grooming services available at veterinary clinic

By CAROLYN PLOTTS

She's probably tired of hearing it by now, but it can be said that animal groomer Maritta Van Pelt has gone to the dogs.

What else do you say to a person who bathes and grooms dogs (and cats), all day long, talking to them like they are people.

"I'm an animal lover," said Mrs. Van Pelt as she hoisted Jewell, a 10-year old Golden Retriever owned by Sara Davis of Norton, into the "bathtub" at Norton Animal Health Center.

Jewell had done this before and seemed to actually enjoy the shampoo lather and the spray hose as it rinsed her clean.

"My main goal is to make these guys trust me," she said. "I don't want to hurt them."

She said she likes to start dogs while they are still puppies. It's a gentling process that starts out slow and allows them to get used to the different things she does. There are the strange noises of a blow dryer and hair trimmer and the sensation of moving on an elevated grooming platform.

Mrs. Van Pelt has been a groomer for 8 1/2 years having been trained by a professional in McCook. The rest of it she learned on-the-job at Countryside Veterinary Clinic in Oberlin. She worked there until Feb. 15 when Drs. Aaron and Sarah White bought the veterinary clinic in Norton and she came to work for them.

Every year she goes to Kansas City to attend the "Grooming Classic" where new pet care products are introduced and updated grooming techniques are demonstrated.

"It's really exciting to go," she said. "There are always new cuts and new products to learn about."

On her wish-list is a lighted grooming table that illuminates the animals underside to help get

a better cut. She would also like a grooming table with stairs to save on back strain and then there are the clippers with a built-in vacuum to keep animal hair at bay.

It takes about 1 1/2 hours to groom a dog; 2-2 1/2 hours for a Bichon or a standard poodle that have more complicated cuts. Big farm dogs that come in for their annual shave before summer are sometimes "woolly" and matted. They might take up to 3 hours to finish, she said.

Long-haired cats take 2 hours while a short-haired cat might get done in about 1 1/2 hours.

She likes to visit with her client and determine just how they want their pet done. She said her job is similar to that of a beautician except that her customers don't stand still and may want to lay down. The most important part of the whole grooming process is the comb-out. "It really makes the cut," she said.

A grooming appointment includes shampoo and conditioner (except for the wire-haired breeds), hair cut, ears cleaned, toenails trimmed (and polished if requested), a spritz of doggie perfume called "Foo Foo" and teeth checked.

As she is petting and grooming an animal, Mrs. Van Pelt is also checking for lumps, worms or unusual discharge.

She might be the first to detect a suspicious condition and alert the veterinarian.

To make an appointment for your pet to be groomed, call her at the veterinary clinic at 877-2411.

Originally from Norton, her parents were Glen and Leonor Foight.

Mrs. Van Pelt and her husband Keith live in Oberlin. They have three grown children; Curt and Jason who both live in McCook and Leah from Dresden. They also have eight grandchildren.



Jewell (above) seemed to enjoy her bath from groomer Maritta Van Pelt. K-State University graduate, Dr. George

Atkinson (below) sat on the porch of the home he built next door to his clinic in 1957. — Photo by Carolyn Plotts

## Veterinarian started clinic 58 years ago

By CAROLYN PLOTTS

When Dr. George Atkinson came to Norton in 1947, he practiced veterinary medicine out of the basement of his home at 501 N. Norton. A graduate of the Kansas State University School of Veterinary Medicine with the class of '43, he bought the practice which included the house from Dr. Dave Manley. He practiced out of his home until 1952, when he built the clinic on U.S. Highway 36.

He purchased 12-acres and eventually built his home next door to the clinic. The main building is now where the grooming and exam rooms are.

He said he treated both large and small animals and that his was the first veterinary clinic in northwest Kansas to have truck-in capabilities.

Farmers could bring an animal in for treatment, instead of having the veterinarian go to the farm.

"It was crude," he said. "But I

didn't have a plan when I built it. They've improved on it a lot."

Dr. Atkinson recalls that in 1962, Richard Wiltfong, also a Kansas State University veterinary school grad, was fresh out of the service.

"Richard was born and raised in Norton, so I called him to see if he was interested in joining the practice," Dr. Atkinson said. "He was."

In 1975, the facility was updated with the addition of a surgical suite in an addition to the north.

The two doctors worked together for 25 years before Dr. Atkinson retired in 1985, selling the practice to Dr. Steve Graf who continued with Dr. Wiltfong.

The clinic later sold to Dr. Fred Beeman who sold it to local investors Bill Steinmetz and Ronnie Fisher who sold it to Drs. Mark Olson and Travis Hisson of Countryside Veterinary Clinic, Oberlin. On Feb. 15, Drs. Aaron and Sarah White bought the prac-



the people of Norton County are the best people in the world.

"The veterinary practice has changed. The little farmers have disappeared. They're all gone. But farm people are the best people in the world to work for."

## Steel costs may hurt bridge jobs

By VERONICA MONIER

The price of steel has gone up and Norton County is feeling it.

Road and Bridge Supervisor Tom Brannan told the Norton County Commissioners Monday that he got bids on deck sheets, h-pile and structural steel. This year, he said, he had to order about \$30,000 more in h-pile and deck sheets to take care of some bigger bridges the county is building.

The bids were: three for deck sheets — Husker Steel, \$35,093.76; Welborn Sales, \$28,867.20; and D-C Wholesale, \$28,704; five for h-pile — Husker Steel, \$48,398; Salina Steel, \$59,330.88; Welborn Sales, \$59,675.62; Bridge and Highway, \$52,526.88; and Oden Enterprises, \$48,970.44; and five for structural steel — Big R, \$129,014; Husker Steel, \$108,961; Salina Steel, \$109,638.52; Welborn Sales, \$109,758.32; and Oden Enterprises, \$107,073.33.

The commissioners accepted the low bids of \$28,704 from D-C Wholesale for deck sheets, \$48,398 from Husker Steel for h-pile; and \$107,073.33 from Oden Enterprises for structural steel.

Mr. Brannan said with the exception of Big R, all of the bids were very close.

"There's quite a bit of expense here," said Commissioner Leroy Lang.

Mr. Brannan said last year, bids totaled \$116,144, while this year, the total is \$184,175.

"There is a \$68,031 difference from last year to this year," he said. "We can automatically account for \$30,000 of the higher costs because of getting more h-pile and deck sheets. But, we're about \$30,000 higher than last year."

Mr. Lang asked Lloyd Johnson from Husker Steel, who was at the

meeting, what he thought about steel prices.

Mr. Johnson said his boss tells him that he thinks it's leveled off.

"We don't think it's going to go up anymore, but we don't think it's going to go down either," he said. "Hopefully, we can find something to work with."

Mr. Brannan said they knew it was going to go up. We're up 21-28 percent higher, he said.

"We knew it was going to happen, we just didn't know how much."

He said the money to pay for the materials is all coming out of the bridge fund. The county might have to do one or two fewer bridges than the 30 planned if

money runs out, he said.

In other business, the commissioners:

- Sold the Almena church property and building in an auction that was held Monday in the courthouse lobby. The property and building sold for \$1,900 to William G. and Gayle L. Alexander of Almena. Don McMullen of McMullen and Wyatt Auction was the auctioneer.

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