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Animal hospital serves city and its pets for 25 years

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In Egypt, cats have long been revered as beautiful and graceful creatures. Hailing from there, Dr. Sammy M. Emara has taken this respect and put it into his veterinary practice in Sunrise.

Of course, he would never dream of forgetting about dogs, animals he describes as "faithful creatures."

Emara has been running his practice in Sunrise for nearly 25 years, the anniversary coming up in January. As a child growing up in Egypt, there were always animals in the house and he knew from an early age he wanted to be a veterinarian.

"I love dogs and cats, especially cats," he said.

In fact, when he first opened the practice, someone left a crate with a 3-month-old kitten at the doorstep. He adopted it and named it Mishmish, which means apricot in Arabic.

Emara interned at the University of Colorado and then moved to Los Angeles to study for the veterinary exam. When he was licensed in Florida, he practiced for five years in Naples and Tampa. Then he decided to become his own boss and started Sunset Animal Hospital in 1986.

The practice focuses on cats and dogs, and the office is equipped to handle vaccinations, exams and some surgeries, including spaying and neutering. The office staff is small — there are only three employees total — for a family-style experience for patients. Camie Smith, the office manager, said this is what makes the office so successful. Emara and his staff have watched many animals grow up from puppies and kittens.

"It's amazing to watch them turn from little babies to smart little creatures," Smith said. "You're with them [the owners] all the way through their pet's growth; you get that bond with them."

Nicole Bedgood, who works the front desk and helps wherever she can, added that they are honest with their clients.

"If there is something we can't do, we don't say we can," she said. "We never hide anything."



Dr. Sammy Emara, who has been with Sunset Animal Hospital since it opened 25 years ago, examines his patient, Sasha, with office manager Camie Smith. (Janeris Marte, FPG / November 11, 2010)

Emara said that sometimes people come into an animal hospital apprehensive about services and prices. The staff is filled in on why different procedures cost what they do, and the doctor involves the family in the decision-making process when it comes to their pet.

"The principle is honesty and do whatever is necessary," he said.

The staff is also respectful and honest with one another. Emara is never too senior for any job and helps with clean up. The doctor describes his practice as democratic, and decisions are made by the staff together.

With the economic times giving pet owners an added struggle, the office also tries to help however they can. They match prices and refer them to organizations that might be able to help them with expenses.

For the dogs and cats that might not come through Sunset Animal Hospital's front doors, the office also makes regular donations to area charities, such as the Humane Society, Pet Aid League, Friends of Animals and Stop Pet Overpopulation Together.

"[We do it] to help people who cannot afford to take care of their dog and cat. We do it for the sake of the [pet]," Emara said.

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