

Four-legged physio

Kathy Broughton
can't talk to the
animals, but

Ottawa's only animal
physiotherapist sure
can heal them, as

Norma Greenaway
discovers.

Kid Chocolate is back. Five months after Kid's pelvis was severed from his spine when he was struck by a car, the 13-year-old grey tabby is chasing chipmunks, catching mice and behaving "like a kitten," as his owner puts it.

In between, there were two major operations, dozens of acupuncture treatments and hours of creative exercise regimes dreamed up by physiotherapist Kathy Broughton, a sunny 33-year-old animal lover who has never met a gimpy gait she didn't want to fix.

Ms. Broughton went so far as to outfit Kid, also known as KC, with a tiny, heated swimming pool made from an old waterbed mattress so he could paddle his weakened hind leg muscles back to acceptable strength.

Though water and cats are not considered an automatic fit, Ms. Broughton gave the pool idea a whirl when the owner told her KC had a history of wading into the water at the family cottage.

Ms. Broughton is the only physiotherapist currently specializing in treating animals in the Ottawa area. The biggest challenge? "Animals don't talk," she says. "They can't tell you where it hurts."

She moves fearlessly be-



tween treating everything from a rambunctious 35-kilogram Rottweiler to giant Clydesdale horses.

"I've never been kicked, attacked or bitten by an animal and I plan to keep it that way," she explains as she eases into treating Cassie, a golden retriever suffering from a sprained paw, bone spurs and early arthritis.

Ms. Broughton believes in taking the time to play and bond with the animal before beginning treatment.

On a recent house call, she was completely undeterred when she was greeted at a gated, country spread in Carp by a sign that showed the faces of two Rottweilers baring their teeth above the sign: Beware of Dog.

Ms. Broughton bounded out of the car and within seconds was embracing and petting two excited Rottweilers, one of whom she had treated before, the other a new patient. Ms. Broughton, who works under the direction of different veterinarians, was back to evaluate Lexi, a 14-month-old with a pulled muscle.

While owner Lily Neibuhr walked and trotted her dog around the living room and up and down stairs, Ms. Broughton assessed his problem and developed ideas for treating it with exercises.

"Don't fight the physio-terrorist," she cracked as she took hold of Lexi and began exploring his sore limb.

By the time she was teaching Ms. Neibuhr how to massage her dog and carry out leg stretches, Lexi was like putty in her hands, sprawled on the floor, sighing contentedly as she manipulated his hind legs.

"I love working with people who have really well-trained pets," she says, noting with

Kathy Broughton gives Cassie the golden retriever an ultrasound as part of the dog's therapy.

some envy Lexi's split-second responses to Ms. Neibuhr's commands. Her own beloved dog, Sheba, a cross between a husky and German shepherd, is a bit of a slug by comparison.

Ms. Broughton is a physiotherapist to people and animals. In some cases, she treats both owners and their animals. "You know," she laughs. "Some owners say, 'You fixed my horse's back pain, what can you do for me?'"

Her rate of \$70 for an initial assessment and \$40 per treatment is the same for pet and owner, she said, adding some dog owners now have medical insurance for their pets that, like human insurance, covers some or all of the cost if they have a prescription from a vet.

Two days a week her patients are the two-legged human variety. The other three days are reserved for four-legged beasts, mostly horses and dogs.

In fact, Kid Chocolate is a rare cat patient. Ms. Broughton says the well-earned reputation of cats as aloof, independent beings often makes them poor candidates for physiotherapy. On top of that, she calls them phenomenal stretchers and self-healers.

Still, the story of KC, named after a feisty featherweight boxer from Havana, is one of Ms. Broughton's favourite stories in a string of tales about life as a member of a small but growing community of animal physiotherapists in Canada.

"This cat had an incredible will to live," she said.

Veterinarian Nick Parker, the orthopedic surgeon who operated on KC at the Alta

Vista Animal Hospital, said the determination of KC's owner to save her cat allowed him to use all the medical resources available to try to bring the cat back.

Dr. Parker says collaboration between vets and physiotherapists has grown across North America over the last decade or so as medical trends in the human population spread to the animal world.

In Canada, about 100 physiotherapists belong to the Canadian Horse and Animal Therapists Association. Started in 1995, the group publishes a quarterly newsletter that, among other things, allows physiotherapists to swap stories about their cases and treatments.

'Don't fight the physio-terrorist.'

Ms. Broughton, the group's treasurer, has beefed up her knowledge by taking special courses on the anatomy of animals, spending time on an animal rehabilitation farm in Alberta and buying "lots of expensive textbooks."

A graduate of the four-year physiotherapy program at McMaster University in Hamilton, the tall blond admits she has a special affinity for humans and animals who suffer athletic injuries. Her first job was at a sports-injuries centre in Kelowna, B.C.

Ms. Broughton, an Ottawa native, grew up riding horses and playing most sports, suffering countless injuries along the way. Indeed, on a recent day of rounds she was hobbling on one leg after

damaging the ligament in her already surgically reconstructed right knee playing ultimate frisbee.

Before loading the car with the ultrasound equipment she uses on many of her four-legged patients, she paused to give her knee a treatment. Ultrasound, used on humans and animals, is a sound wave absorbed by the body that helps reduce swelling, helps break down adhesions on scar tissues, and also works as an anti-inflammatory.

Ms. Broughton began working with horses in 1996, and they clearly still provide some of her most challenging moments. After all, she says, it's a mind-stretching activity to come up with exercises for a Clydesdale who has pulled a major muscle in his rear.

"There's no way you could pick up a limb and stretch it because each limb probably weighed 150 pounds, or more than me," she said.

"There have been ones like that where I have had to say, 'I need to go home and think about what I can do.'" Her solution for the Clydesdale was to build a box and get the horse to lift its front end on to the structure, thereby stretching out his hind limbs. The bribe to get the horse to heave himself up on the box and stretch forward? Hay.

The biggest thrill she got was discovering the Clydesdale would repeat the exercise on the box in his field even when she and the owner were not there to cajole it along. She contends animals know intuitively what is good for them. "Once they figure it out that they feel better after this is done, they do it."