

Polly want a checkup?

Last July, Delores Deters noticed her 38-year-old macaw, Arthur, wasn't feeling well. So the Western Springs resident took the bird in to see Dr. Robert Ness, a veterinarian in Lisle who specializes in exotic animals.

Arthur was near death, but Ness got to the root of the problem after feeling an egg inside the bird. It turned out that Arthur was female.

Arthur had an egg that she was blocked with that we didn't realize because we thought she was a he," Deters said.

One surgery and nearly one year later, Arthur is alive and well. On March 28, Deters took the bird for a checkup and the macaw was given a clean bill of health.

Ness' practice, the Ness Exotic Wellness Center at 1007 Maple Ave., is one of a few in the Chicago area that exclusively treat exotic animals. The practice also offers holistic care, which Ness will provide to dogs and cats. The holistic treatment includes ancient Chinese medicine, herbal formulas, acupuncture and chiropractic care.

Birds, guinea pigs, rabbits, turtles and ferrets are among the animals the practice sees regularly. Because there are so few exotic animal clinics, clients come from as far as Iowa, Wisconsin and Indiana for care, Ness said.

The practice moved into its Maple Avenue facility Feb. 18 from 820 Ogden Ave., where the center was housed with an emergency veterinary clinic. Ness said the new building is much more high-tech and better accommodates patients' needs.

The facility includes two pharmacies - for conventional and holistic medicine - and digital radiography, surgery recovery cages with heated floors and oxygen tanks and an isolation ward for patients with infectious diseases. The practice is also constructing a memorial garden for animals that have passed away.

On April 20, the Ness Exotic Wellness Center is offering an open house for anyone interested in seeing what the practice has to offer.

While Ness advocates conventional medicine, for the past decade he has been integrating holistic medicine into his practice.

After practicing for several years, Ness said he "became more frustrated with what we could do conventionally."

The herbal formulas he uses are successful in slowing the growth of a cancer or tumor, boosting the immune system and boosting hormones, he said. For example, if an animal has an infection, Ness might prescribe an antibiotic and an immunity booster to get the best results.

Among the patients taking advantage of Ness' holistic approach is Reba McEnrabbit. The 12-year-old bunny, owned by Margo Lakin, has been having trouble absorbing fluids into her gastrointestinal tract.

While Lakin, who splits her time between Florida and Oak Park, sees another veterinarian for conventional care, she hopes Ness' holistic supplemental treatment will add a few years to Reba's life. On March 28, Reba received a chiropractic treatment from Ness, which will help the rabbit hop around with more ease.

Lakin's passion for her pet is a common theme at the Ness Exotic Wellness Center.

"It's what makes this type of work fun," Ness said.

About the Author

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