

Saving Samson

By Cheryl Brady
Owner, Vet Care Express Animal Ambulance

Fourth of July, for most people, is a day of fun, relaxation and hanging out with friends. But for those in the business of saving animals' lives, it's another day of being on hand to help whenever a call comes in. Fortunately for a tiny, stray Beagle puppy, many people were available this past Fourth of July to all pitch in together to try to save his life.

The call was answered by Steve Bell, an officer with Manatee County Animal Services. There was a very sick stray puppy in Bradenton that needed to be picked up and taken to a veterinary hospital for care. The puppy was brought to Animal ER of University Park, a veterinary emergency clinic that cares for all Manatee County Animal Services' cases on holidays, weekends and after hours.



After examining the puppy and performing some tests, there was a heartbreaking diagnosis—the puppy had Parvo. Short for Parvovirus, Parvo is a highly contagious and deadly viral illness most commonly found in puppies, especially strays that have not been protected by maternal antibodies or vaccination. Parvo is such a devastating virus that the mortality rate is approximately 91 percent if left untreated, and the chance of survival with treatment is only around 50 percent. Because of these odds, the reality is that most stray puppies that are diagnosed with Parvo are put to sleep, simply because their odds of surviving the virus are slim. They don't have families that will help them with their recovery (and some never will), and the cost of the intensive treatment a puppy with the virus needs is substantial.

Thankfully for this stray puppy, both fate and a team of extraordinary animal caregivers intervened and offered him a chance to survive. On duty at the Animal ER that day was Certified Veterinary Technician Terri Nagle, who also is the practice manager. One of Terri's close family friends, Debbie Pfender, had told her how she was looking for a Beagle puppy, but had not been able to find the "right" one. Debbie and her husband, Bill, had lost their dear Beagle "Snickers" two years ago and were now ready to adopt another one.



Something about this stranded puppy made Terri think of Debbie, so she gave her a call. When Debbie met the puppy, she, too, felt that he somehow was destined to be a part of her family. The sick puppy was tri-colored like Snickers, and he even had some of the same mannerisms as the beloved Beagle the couple had lost. Even though he was very ill and there were no guarantees of his survival, if Debbie would give him a home, Animal ER could begin treatment and try to save his life. Debbie agreed and because he needed to fight and would require extraordinary strength to win this battle, she named him Samson after the only man in the Bible to whom God gave extraordinary strength. Now that Samson had the promise of a loving home, Terri began to work on the coordination of care, logistics and finances that his treatment would entail, which, for Parvo puppies, includes round-the-clock care for at least a few days. Because it is an emergency clinic, Animal ER is closed during the day, but re-opens each night and also is open on weekends and holidays. Samson came in on Wednesday, July 4, so he could be treated that day and night at Animal ER, but needed to be transported to another veterinary clinic during the day on Thursday and Friday. Steve from Manatee County Animal Services knew the vice president of a local animal rescue organization, so he suggested that Terri call her to see if the group would be willing to help. Terri contacted Sue Kolze with Animal Network Inc., a local group with a mission to "help people help animals." The group plays a tremendous role in Manatee County, servicing both the county and individual pet owners by helping in whatever way is needed to save and care for pets. In speaking with Sue, Terri explained Samson's plight and discussed how he would need daytime veterinary care and help with the finances for that care. Sue and Animal Network, Inc., stepped right up and offered to help. Animal Network's partner in veterinary care is Beach Veterinary Clinic, so Sue made arrangements with the clinic for Samson's daytime care. Now that veterinary care was lined up, there was one last piece to the puzzle: How was Samson going to get to Beach Veterinary Clinic each morning and back to Animal ER each evening? That's when Sue suggested that Terri call Vet Care Express Animal Ambulance to see if we would help. We had helped Animal Network in the past by transporting sick pets, and Sue knew we would be willing to transport Samson. With plans for round-the-clock care and transport in place, another question needed to be addressed: Who was going to pay for all of Samson's medical care? Because the virus is so highly contagious, costs for Parvo puppies can quickly escalate because of their special needs, which include dedicated technicians for eight-hour shifts, dedicated equipment and supplies, IV meds, quarantined areas, separate areas for walking and a means to decontaminate every space in which the dog has played and slept. To help pet owners in need, Animal ER has long operated a program called the "Round Up Program" that has been generously funded by clients that agree to round up their bill to contribute to the clinic's "Compassionate Care Fund." Animal ER was able to use some of the funds from the program, along with generous contributions from two of their technicians—Terri Nagle and Melissa Mueller—to pay for the costs of Samson's care. The team also received funds from Save The Animals Now, a nonprofit organization in Venice, Florida, whose mission is to raise funds to provide financial assistance to any animal species for medical care which is above and beyond routine care. The group's primary focus is animals that needlessly would be euthanized at rescues, shelters or other facilities that do not have funding available to provide the care needed to keep the animals alive. In Samson's case, Animal Network, Inc., paid for the care that was provided during the day at Beach Veterinary Clinic and

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Photo by Connie Summers

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Animal ER, Animal Network, and Vet Care Express Animal Ambulance all split the cost for transporting him between the clinics. Debbie and Bill are so grateful for the care and generosity during Samson's difficult recovery and have re-contributed back to Animal ER's Compassionate Care Fund to help others that may find themselves in the same difficult situation. Finally, after four days of round-the-clock care and treatment, Samson was able to go home with his new family. Today, the pup is doing great, has no extended problems, needs no ongoing long-term care and is expected to live a long, happy life! Samson spends his days running circles around his 11-year-old brother, Marvin—which, at times, Marvin loves and at other times not so much! Along with helping Marvin be more active and act younger, Samson has brought great joy to both Debbie and Bill, once again completing their happy, pet-loving family. ❀



From left to right, Bill Pfender, Terri Nagle of Animal ER of University Park, Debbie Pfender, Cheryl Brady of Vet Care Express and Mary Donahue of Save the Animals Now

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Cheryl Brady is the owner of Vet Care Express Animal Ambulance, the first emergency animal ambulance transport service in Florida. For more information about Vet Care Express or to schedule a transport, please call 941-592-5131, or visit www.vetcareexpress.com. Animal ER of University Park is located at 8237 Cooper Creek Boulevard in University Park. For more information, call 941-355-2884 or visit www.animalerofuniversitypark.com.

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Pictured top left: Sampson in quarantine after being diagnosed with Parvo. At left, Debbie and Bill Pfender, the local couple that gave Sampson a new home. Photos by Cheryl Brady