

## PETS

# Cultural differences extend to care of animals

Foreign students train on proper pet care.

By Bob Ratterman  
Contributing Writer

OXFORD — Pets being abandoned in the rural areas around town by Miami students after the academic year has long been a problem, but with the recent push by the university to recruit more Asian students, pet care has been added to the issues of cultural understanding.

A local veterinarian practice has tried to tackle that problem head-on with education through a Furry Friends Fair on the Miami campus.

Dr. Molly Buckley said her practice—Animal Care Clinic—has seen many students with a cat or a dog not equipped to deal with their pets, but international students add another layer of misunderstanding even as to such basic things as needing to make an appointment at the veterinarian's office and not just showing up.

A flyer included in the orientation packet and the Furry Friends Fair are efforts to provide that education and head off problems.

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Jennifer Marston  
Practice manager at the Animal  
Care Clinic

"It has been three or four years since Miami started recruiting Asian students heavily. When you purchase pets, you have to plan for caring for your pets after school. It's about budgeting time for pets," she said. "Students need to budget time for their studies and should budget time for their pets' health and well-being."

Buckley said it is often a lack of information, citing an example of students bringing in a cat saying it was suffering from asthma when, in fact, the sound was the cat purring.

Jennifer Marston, practice manager at the Animal Care Clinic, said they decided to expand the office discussion of the problem to the university to see if some educational efforts could be made.

From that came the Furry Friends Fair, held last semester and planned for both semesters of the 2016-17 year.

"The workshops discuss everything from the cost of pet ownership and making appointments to pet longevity and realistic expectations of how much time you have to spend with your pet at this point in your life," Marston said. "With the help of Jing Luo, program manager of the International Student and Scholar Services Department at Miami University, The Animal Care Clinic developed a workshop that we held on campus in the fall of 2015 and then we participated in a new program the department called The Furry Friends Fair. These programs are designed to help curb some of the mistreatment and abandonment that happens when students leave at the end of the semester."

She said that education extends to such areas as boarding pets to go home for university breaks.

"We tell them they can't just show up. They need an appoint-

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The Animal Care Clinic participates in the Freedom Fest parade July 2. CONTRIBUTED / BOB RATTERMAN

## Pet

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ment with a boarding facility. They need vaccinations," Marston said. "It's a lot of education along with training and feeding."

Part of their discussion, Buckley said, is the reasons students want to have pets — stress, companionship, no one else to talk to.

"They are thousands of miles from home, with issues to address beyond pet ownership," Buckley said.

Marston took up the topic, adding Luo saw it as an issue to address.

"Jing is not a pet owner so it did not cross her mind why students want to own pets. She has really taken it on," Marston said.

Luo said her office hosts weekly programs for international students in September and October on an

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Jing Luo

Program manager of the International Student and Scholar Services Department at Miami University

array of topics dealing with culture, rules and practices and this issue of pet ownership fit nicely into that series. By the past spring semester, however, it was expanded into the Furry Friends Fair with other pet professionals invited to take part and was well-received. Although aimed at international students, all students were welcome, she said.

She said cultural differences often play a role in the perception of how to treat or care for the animals.

"In the semester before, we had two calls from local veterinarians about concerns international students were not taking care of their pets.

Their way of dealing with pets is different in their home country," she said. "The original workshop was not effective."

She's hoping interaction with groups like the 4 Paws for Ability, a campus group working with an organization in Xenia, will help. Students assist in the training of service dogs, educate the public on service dogs and disabilities and help 4 Paws with their mission to improve the lives of people with disabilities.

"We hope students would do volunteer work, rather than owning a pet," Luo said.

Marston echoed that noting Luo has arranged trips

to area pet adoption agencies to allow students to volunteer by walking or caring for animals to get their "pet fix" without the responsibilities of ownership.

"We're hearing horror stories. We heard a story about a dog abandoned in an apartment. We're hoping it does not keep happening," Marston said. "We want people to think about the pet, take in information. What is their lifestyle. Their job? Do they have time to take care of it. Maybe a fish is a better pet, but you can't pet a fish."

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