

## Vets speak out on ovarian cancer

BY DAVID SHAROS

For The Sun

To fight ovarian cancer, the Ovarian Cancer Symptom Awareness Organization is hoping that veterinarians and pets just might save the lives of their owners.

On Jan. 25, a new Veterinary Outreach Program was launched at the Gateway Veterinary Clinic in St. Charles and owner Dr. Kurt Klepitsch became the first member of the program, a joint effort that partners the OCSA with the Illinois State Veterinary Medical Association.

According to Peter Weber, executive director of the ISVMA, many veterinarians report that pet owners who talk with them about their pet's health issues are often more forthcoming about their own health problems. Klepitsch, 49, confirmed pet owners frequently talk about health issues beyond those related to their animal.

"I've been here since 1990, and over the course of time, you develop personal relationships with a lot of owners, and they tell you a lot of things about themselves and vice-versa," Klepitsch said. "There is a lot of give and take, and I'd say conversations about someone's health or that of a child or relative are at least a weekly thing."

Klepitsch noted that a lot more women are getting involved in veterinary medicine, which might help female pet owners open up more about health issues.

"I never envisioned there being something like this today, but hopefully a lot of people will join this program and help get the message out," he said. "My feeling is that this has to be a subtle thing. Vets are very busy folks, but if we hear things, we want people



**Dr. Kurt Klepitsch, pictured here with Dr. Brenda Jones, is the first member in the Veterinary Outreach Program launched Jan. 25 at the Gateway Veterinary Clinic in St. Charles.** | COURTESY OF DAVID SHAROS

to know where they can get more help, and if we just reach some of the people, that will be a positive thing. I hope this program will have some legs."

About 30 people gathered in the Gateway waiting room as a number of officials connected with the program spoke. A representative from Gov. Pat Quinn's office, Dr. Brenda Jones, who also serves as the deputy director for the Illinois Department of Health's office of women's health, offered support for the program.

"We want to be part of this movement that helps women and makes them aware of this disease, and we support this initiative that gives an opportunity for education for women in the state of Illinois," Jones said.

Another woman who expressed hope for the program was Vallie Szymanski of St. Charles, who serves as the executive director of

OCSA and has been a client of Dr. Klepitsch for 20 years. She said Klepitsch has taken care of her cats and dogs and that she has had many conversations about human health issues with him during that time.

"I frequently have talked with Dr. Klepitsch about a number of issues after he was done examining one of my pets so as to not interrupt him, and while he never pretended to be a medical doctor, he'd often suggest that I have certain things checked out," Szymanski said.

"My father was a vet and lived in a rural area where there aren't a lot of doctors all the time, and vets are often sought out for medical advice. But here, they can get help."

Peter Weber, executive director of the Illinois State Veterinary Medical Association, was on hand Friday and noted that "symptom awareness" was an important ele-

ment in addressing ovarian cancer and promised that a ground swell of support for the VOP program already was building.

"I'm comfortable that there will be thousands in the network within the first year," Weber said.

"There are other doctors already reaching out to us hoping to replicate what we're doing here today throughout the state, as well as corporations that have been contacting us offering financial support."

A number of those in attendance admitted their lives had been touched by ovarian cancer, including Dr. W. Ron DeHaven, chief executive officer of the American Veterinary Medical Association.

"My mother died of ovarian cancer, and this is an exciting program that we feel is quite natural given that human health and animal health are inseparable and are tied together," he said.

## Dentists with heart help those in need

BY JANE DONAHUE

For The Beacon-News

Twelve years ago, Dr. Brian Tonner and Dr. Gary Ahasic started a Dentist with a Heart, a program to provide free dental care for those who otherwise wouldn't receive it.

"(We) came up with the idea because of the need in our community," said Ahasic, who along with Tonner, practice at Fairview Dental in Aurora. "Statistically, less than 50 percent of people see a dentist on a regular basis. While many employers provide dental insurance, and the state provides dental treatment for those on public aid, we were aware that many individuals or families would slip through the cracks."

Since 2001, Dentist with a Heart has provided more than 7,000 patients with more than \$1 million in free dental services. And this year, more than 72 dentists will donate their time and services.

Tonner said the story is not about "the numbers."

"The story is about the family of five without dental insurance who show up every year at 5 a.m. to make sure their kids get a dental exam and cleaning," the dentist said. "(It's) about the young man who hadn't been to the dentist in years due to lack of money; his visit (led to a diagnosis) of oral cancer and later treatment saved his life. The story is about a 6-year-old boy who doesn't speak English, and can't sleep or pay attention in school because of an abscessed tooth."

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends

children have their first dental visit by age 1. For many families, that's not a possibility, which is why Tonner said the need for a program like this is so great.

"We have seen people in desperate need of basic dental care," Tonner said. "State dental plans for the underserved have been severely underfunded for years."

Sue Rahn of the Aurora Children's Dental Services agrees.

"Dental care is most often something that is pushed to the bottom of the list of priorities when you are trying to make your dollars stretch," said Rahn, who volunteers to coordinate logistics and get the word out regarding the annual event.

"We are able to provide treatment to many of these families who might do without dental care if this event were not available each year."

And Rahn said, for area residents, it's a simple as showing up at a participating dentist office on the day of service.

"A common concern among potential patients is that they will be required to demonstrate need by verifying income; there aren't any eligibility requirements," Rahn said. "Sometimes people think that this sounds too good to be true; they think there must be a catch, and it can't really be free. It is!"

Dentist with a Heart will take place throughout the month of February, and detailed information on