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## NEWS & EVENTS

### Jasper's Legacy: Love and the Search for a Cure

Newly married in 2005, Diane Civetta and her husband, John, wanted to expand their family with a dog. They agreed upon a labradoodle based on the breed's temperament and reputation for being hypoallergenic. While the Civettas planned to acquire their pet from a breeder, they decided they would first visit a pet store near their home in Scarsdale, New York, so that John Civetta, who was unfamiliar with labradoodles, could see what they look like.

"When I walked into the pet store, I saw my beautiful Jasper running around his cage," Diane Civetta recalled. "I walked right over to him and fell in love with him."

At the time, Diane Civetta's daughter, Emily Yankowitz, was at a sleep-away camp. Yankowitz asked her mother to wait until she returned before bringing Jasper home. Civetta agreed, but began making daily visits to the pet store.

"I would come into the pet store and Jasper would start barking and running around his cage," Civetta said. "The store owner would take him out and we would go into an empty room together. I would sit on the floor and Jasper would run around me, sit on my lap and make humming sounds."

After several days, Civetta



Diane

*Civetta created Jasper's Legacy of Love Fund in honor of her dog who was treated for anal sac carcinoma.*

entered the pet store and found Jasper's cage empty. The store owner told Civetta the bad news: Jasper had pneumonia and she planned to return him to his breeder in Missouri.

"I was stunned and told her that Jasper was my boy and I still wanted him," Civetta said. "The pet store owner told me that she would only pay a nominal amount for Jasper's medical care, and once again, I told her that I still wanted Jasper. I will never forget when the pet store owner brought me into the back and Jasper was using a nebulizer and he had the mask on his snout. He looked so weak and sad. I stayed with him the whole day and felt guilty leaving him."

Once the Civetta family took Jasper home, he required twice-weekly treatments for his pneumonia until he fully recovered.

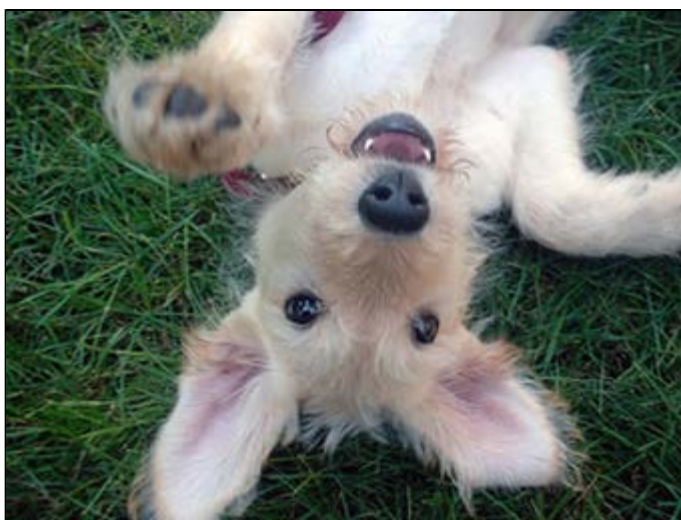
For nearly 11 years, Jasper was a central part of the Civetta family. Jasper's vitality and utter joy filled their lives with excitement and love. He relished running with other dogs at the park, chasing rabbits, and greeting the mailman. In particular, Jasper enjoyed snuggling and getting his belly rubbed.

However, in December 2014, during Jasper's annual exam, the veterinarian discovered a lump. Diagnosed with anal sac carcinoma, Jasper faced a grim prognosis. Anal sac adenocarcinomas are aggressive tumors that often spread to nearby lymph nodes and organs including the liver, spleen and lungs. To give him the best chance for survival, Jasper underwent surgery to remove his tumor, followed by radiation using a linear accelerator with 3-D conformal therapy, and chemotherapy at the Veterinary Cancer Center in Norwalk, Connecticut.

Jasper was in a tremendous amount of pain and had become incontinent. During his chemotherapy sessions, Jasper developed radiation recall, a skin condition resembling a burn that can be triggered when chemotherapy follows radiation treatments. To help manage the pain, Jeanne Budgin, DVM, a veterinary dermatologist who helped care for Jasper, suggested



*Diane Civetta and her daughter, Emily Yankowitz, cuddle their labradoodle Jasper.*



*Jasper as a playful puppy.*

the family seek treatment for him at Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University in North Grafton, Massachusetts. In addition to care at Tufts, Jasper received help from a veterinary nutritionist who recommended a special diet that minimized his incontinence, and an acupuncturist, who provided pain reduction therapy. With treatment and care from his doctors, and love from his family, Jasper defeated cancer.

Shortly thereafter, he had a minor dorsal laminectomy. The surgery was successful, but Jasper developed aspiration pneumonia. While the Civettas hired around-the-clock technicians to stay with him and were told he had an excellent chance of recovery, Jasper died on May 2, 2016, a month shy of his 11th birthday. The family was heartbroken that Jasper, who had gone through so much to defeat cancer, had ultimately died from unrelated causes.

Diane Civetta decided to channel her grief into helping other dogs and their owners. She began looking for researchers who were investigating anal sac cancer, and with the assistance of Budgin, Civetta learned about research under way at the University of Missouri College of Veterinary Medicine.

"I wanted to make a donation in Jasper's name. When I found the study at MU, because Jasper had come from a breeder in Missouri, I felt like I had come full circle," she said.

On Civetta's behalf, Budgin reached out to Jeffrey Bryan, an associate professor of oncology, director of the Scott Endowed Program in Veterinary Oncology, and director of the Comparative Oncology Radiobiology and Epigenetics Laboratory, to learn more about the research. Bryan and his team are working with researchers in human medicine on a novel treatment to attack anal sac carcinoma and melanoma, two cancers that are common in dogs. Working with client-owned dogs with naturally occurring cancers, Bryan and co-investigator Gary Clark, PhD, an associate professor of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Women's Health, have created a process in which they develop a vaccine using cells from a patient's own tumor.

"Essentially, we are creating a vaccine against the tumor that works by re-educating the immune system," Bryan said. "By this approach we count on the immune system to control the tumor."

To honor Jasper's life and work to end anal sac carcinoma in dogs, Civetta created the Jasper's Legacy of Love Fund with a donation of \$25,000, which will support Bryan and Clark's research. The gift has been used to purchase equipment critical to creating an improved vaccine and has so far funded the treatment of one dog with anal sac carcinoma, Bryan said.

"The patient we treated is doing well since we received the gift for this enhancement. There has been no reoccurrence of the cancer, which typically, we would have expected to see," Bryan said.

The oncology group is looking to recruit patients that need treatment for anal sac carcinoma. The program can now treat patients more quickly because of the equipment purchased through Civetta's generosity. The program will move forward more efficiently in loving memory of Jasper.

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