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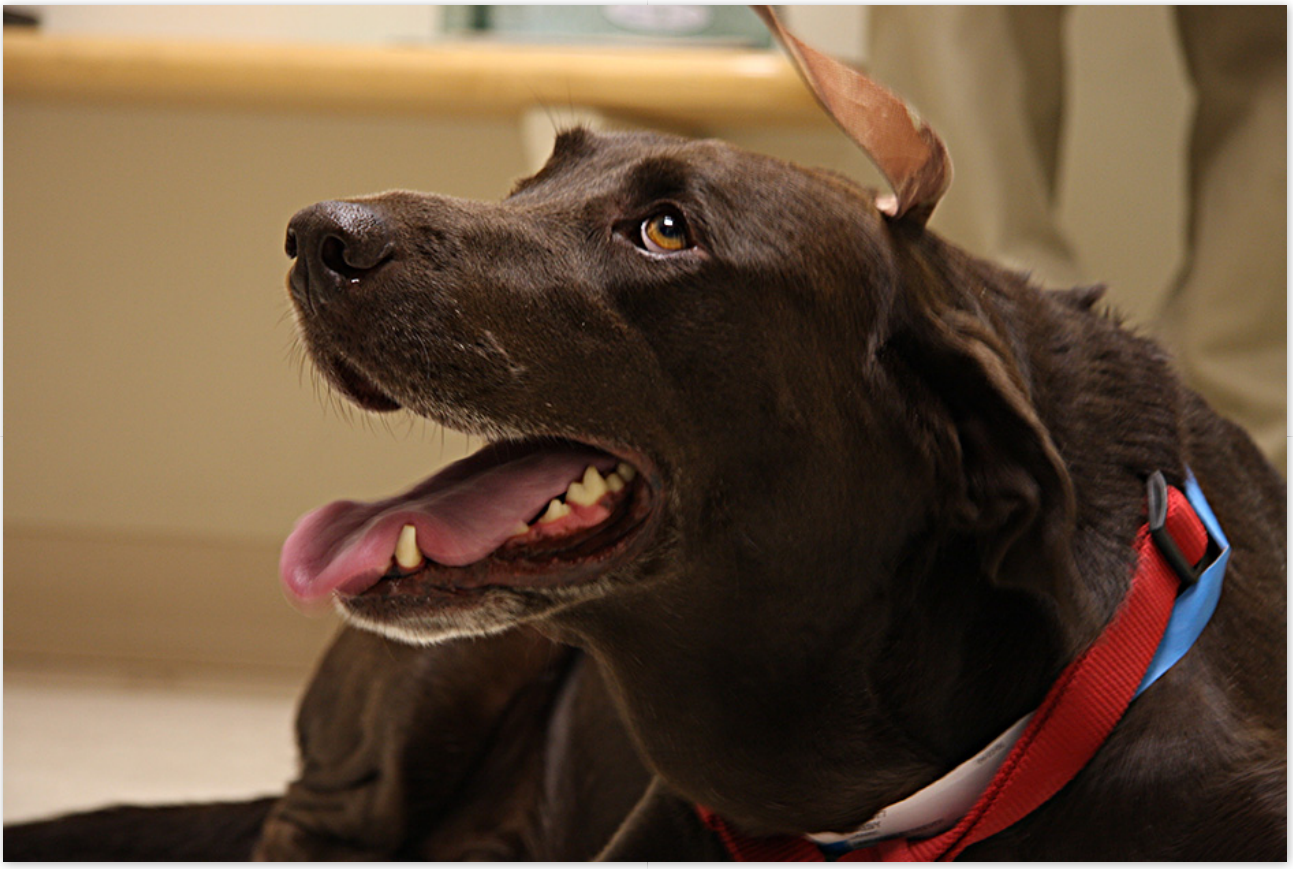
Daisey the Amazing Choco-pup

Meet a resilient Labrador treated at MU's College of Veterinary Medicine.



Kevin Smith found his "best friend" Daisey on an Arkansas country road when she was just a puppy. She has been with him ever since. Photo by Karen Clifford.

Story by Marcus Wilkins

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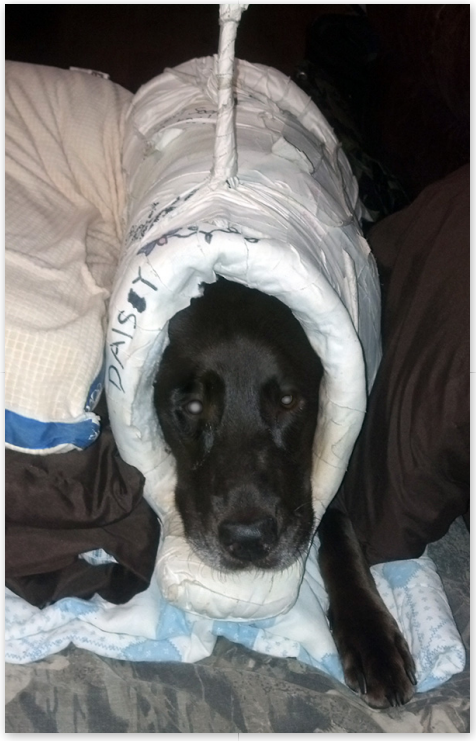
Labrador retrievers — known for their energy, athleticism and even-temperedness — make enthusiastic travel companions. Daisey, of the chocolate variety, is a happy-go-lucky Southern belle who loves trucks.

So when she took a spill off the deck this summer at her Pocahontas, Ark., home, an accident that fractured her second cervical vertebrae and ultimately paralyzed her in all four limbs, her days of riding shotgun were temporarily over.

"She was playing in the back yard with my buddy's black Lab when we heard this awful yelp," says Daisey's owner, Kevin Smith. "She ran up from behind the house, tripped on the pavement and got underneath my pickup. It took me a while to get her out."



Daisey was confined to a body cast after a spine injury, but it didn't take her long to learn how to wriggle free. Photo courtesy of Kevin and Sarah Smith.

Kevin and his wife, Sarah Smith, took the dog to the local clinic where it became clear the facility couldn't perform the appropriate operation. The veterinarian suggested making the five-hour drive to the MU College of Veterinary Medicine.

"The bones were badly displaced, what we call a comminuted fracture," says Joan Coates, BS Ag '87, DVM '90, MU professor of neurology and neurosurgery. "Often times dogs with this type of injury do not live because the damage to the spinal cord is so severe it disrupts the pathways to the breathing centers of the brain."

Coates brought in MU's veterinary surgeon James Tomlinson, professor of orthopedic surgery, for his expertise working with bone fragments and implants.

"Everything had to be exposed, which means dissecting the muscle," says Coates, describing part of her responsibilities during the six-hour procedure. "Tomlinson used seven pins to put all the bones back together and stabilize the joint. This procedure needed both a neurologist and an orthopedist together to create the best possible scenario."

Daisey

Like most Labrador retrievers, Daisey loves people, snacks and car rides. Photo by Karen Clifford.

Smith says putting down their beloved companion was never an option.

"Even after the injury, she was still pretty much happy," he says. "You could tell she was hurting, but when you went up to her, she'd start thwapping her tail."

After surgery, Daisey wore a cast that enveloped the

front half of her body — until she learned how to wiggle out of it. But she wore it long enough to heal. Now she's back in the saddle, hanging her tongue out of the passenger window.

"She likes to go anywhere you can take her," Smith says. "In fact, right after a checkup, we took her on her first trip to Bass Pro Shop. She got a lot of attention there."

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