



Aging pets well worth the care

BY JULIA BAYLY
BDN STAFF

FORT KENT — Laurie Sirois can't imagine her life without Otto.

She's had the American Staffordshire terrier for more than 15 years, ever since getting the little brown 8-week-old puppy in 2000 while living in Portland.

"Otto is like a big brother to my two sons," Sirois, who now lives in Presque Isle, said. "When he was a puppy we moved to Standish, and through my first pregnancy he took daily walks with me through a forest trail to swim in Sebago Lake. My oldest [son] is now 14 and my youngest is 10 [and] Otto's favorite place to be is with them."

Because of advances in understanding the needs of geriatric pets, animals are living longer with improved quality of life

Over the years Sirois said Otto, who has long considered himself a 60-pound "lap dog," has gone from a dog who could nearly outrun cars or bicycles, jump to fetch sticks and climb trees to a more sedentary house pet who needs help navigating stairs and able to take only short walks.

"Due to arthritis and a cancer bout, Otto has lost some muscle tone," she said. "But he still loves to lay in the sunshine and smell the wonderful forest scents of northern Maine."

Sirois said removal of tumors helped her pet beat cancer three years ago, and special diets plus arthritis medication are keeping him happy and pain-free.

Older pets do require more time, attention and often expense, and veterinarians agree it can be well worth it.

"They are fabulous pets," Dr. Katy Hazzard, a veterinarian at Falmouth Veterinary Hospital, said. "Especially if they have spent their whole life with you and they know your patterns and what makes you laugh."

Because of advances in animal care and understanding the needs of geriatric pets, they are living longer with improved quality of life, according to Hazzard.

"We are definitely seeing more older pets. As a [veterinary] practice, we have more older pets than middle age or younger pets, so that does speak to longevity and that more people are willing to spend money to keep pets comfortable," Hazzard said.

This winter Sirois started taking Otto to North Country Animal Hospital in Caribou for a 10-session water therapy program to treat his arthritis.

At \$48 per visit, Sirois acknowledges it's an expense but one she is happy to make.

"Otto is otherwise healthy, so it only makes sense to me to get him well," she said. "He loves the attention [at North Country Animal Hospital] and they are so good to him there."

Most vets rank pets as "senior" See *Pets*, Page C2



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Glen Rea and Al Faust, president of the Maine Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation, look over files on where American chestnut trees have been planted at Rea's home in Bangor on Thursday. The two have been working within the foundation breeding blight resistance from the Chinese chestnut tree into the American chestnut, while keeping the American tree's characteristics.

Second act for a mighty tree

Mainers work to bring back American chestnut

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

Glen Rea walks with satisfaction and even affection along the rows of young American chestnut trees he helped plant 11 years ago in the Buck Hill Conservation Area.

Some trees are thriving, stretching their branches well above the head of the 73-year-old retired stockbroker from Bangor. Others look less healthy, with the telltale red dots of the dreaded chestnut blight fungus spreading lethally across their bark. But every tree in this small breeding orchard is important because each one has a part in a national effort to restore American chestnut trees, which were nearly wiped out a century ago by the accidental introduction of the chestnut blight.

"I'm like a grandparent," Rea, who studied forestry at the University of Maine before switching careers, said of his pride in the Veazie trees. "Chestnut is such a wonderful tree to work with. It grows fast. It produces seed in seven years. It produces nice lumber. ... We have built enough resistance into these trees that they can survive on their own in the wild."

Before 1900, more than 4 billion American chestnut trees marched up the spine of the Appalachian mountains, an essential part of the ecosystem that provided what seemed like a limitless bounty of food and lumber. American chestnuts are smaller

and sweeter than their European and Asian cousins and were an important source of food for humans and wildlife, including deer, bears, turkeys and squirrels.



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American chestnut trees in the Buck Hill Conservation Area in Veazie recently.

Chestnut wood, too, was valuable, both for its ability to withstand rot and for its straight grain. One tree could be turned into the log cabins built by early settlers.

"It was called the cradle-to-grave wood," Rea, the northern breeding coordinator for the Maine Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation, said. "Cradles, tables, beds, caskets, all were made of chestnut."

Back then, the trees were immense. They could grow taller than 100 feet with diameters of up to 14 feet. A photo at Rea's house from turn of the last century shows two Appalachian chestnut harvesters dwarfed by the giant trees they stood beside.

But when the fungal pathogen arrived, likely from chestnut trees imported from Japan or China, things changed fast. Amer-

ican chestnuts had no natural resistance to the fungus, which was carried by wind and wildlife from tree to tree over the first half of the 20th century until the entire species essentially was gone.

"It was very similar to when smallpox came to America," Rea said. "It just wiped out the trees. Someone once said the loss of the American chestnut tree in New England is the biggest ecological disaster since the last glaciation."

A few trees did survive here and there, and last summer University of Maine researchers found the tallest American chestnut in North America in a forest in Lovell, near the New Hampshire border. The discovery of the 115-foot tall — though slender — tree was thrilling to the people who are trying to bring back the species, Rea said.

However, the chestnut forests that were so important to the country were gone, and half-hearted government attempts to save the species through cross-breeding were stopped for good after funding was cut in 1960.

Enter the American Chestnut Foundation, a nonprofit group based in North Carolina that formed in 1983 with the goal of restoring the chestnut tree to the eastern woodlands.

"The foundation stepped in and said we can do this," Rea said.

The group had the goal of breeding blight resistance from the Chinese chestnut tree into the American chestnut, while keeping the American tree's characteristics. In Maine, where committed chestnut tree lovers already were working to try and bring back the species, volunteers joined forces with the national group in 1999. The Maine chapter is one of about a dozen state groups that use local trees in the breeding program to make sure that they will be adapted to the environment. So far, volunteers from the Maine chapter have planted 27,000 blight-resistant hybrid chestnut trees in seed orchards around the state and in the next few years plan to plant 27,000 more trees.

The seed orchards — located in such far-flung locales as Searsport, Stetson, Phippsburg, Winthrop, Lovell, Unity and Morrill — will be around for many decades to

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American chestnut seeds at Glen Rea's home in Bangor are the result of years breeding for blight resistance.

A village 'great room' in Yarmouth

Rustic-modern gathering place a busy community center

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

YARMOUTH — Sitting around the cracker barrel or general store with a wood stove blazing in the background is a Norman Rockwell image of village life. Fast-forward a century, add macchiatos, gourmet pizza and the blue light of digital gadgets, and the weeks-old community carriage house in Yarmouth Village is Maine's modern version.

Attached to Handy's, a specialty market with an OTTO's Pizza and cafe under one roof, this "village great room" opened this month with a nod to the past and solid focus on the future.

"With all of our Wi-Fi and World Wide Web, what is it besides the schools that bring us together?" asked Sean Ireland, the

project's developer. "It's shopping in our hometown and meeting people."

Open morning, noon and night, this coffeehouse by day and pizza place at night is an emerging hybrid. Starting in March, a loft will morph into free public meeting space. It's a model that Ireland, part owner of Handy's, is shopping around to other towns.

"I am a firm believer that smaller communities need flexibility and multi-use, multipurpose spaces," he said. "It's an extension of people's living room, dining room, home office, den. A place to see their friends."

And in our atomized, digital age, human contact is more needed than ever.

"All along our intention was to cast the net wider than a specialty store," said Ireland of what he calls a "community resource" for

this town of 7,200 and surrounding neighbors.

Aesthetically, the space is welcoming.

The open, partial post-and-beam room with cathedral ceilings invites the public to linger. The barnlike atmosphere picks up on the town's heritage. Ireland, who worked on The Press Hotel in Portland, reimagined the best of the past.

"There are so many carriage houses in Yarmouth," said Ireland, who retained old signs from the legendary Andy's Handy Store that opened on Main Street in 1935.

A vintage Moxie sign from the previous shop anchors one wall and Andy's former marquee dominates the mezzanine. On a winter day hot tangerine booths, splashes of gray and warm wood emit an exciting vibe. It's vaguely hip, and yet, with kids and moms camped



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At night the carriage house attached to Handy's Market transitions into dining for OTTO Pizza customers.

out over scones, community-centric to the core.

Upstairs, Gorham Savings Bank has leased the loft for two years. The bank is offering it up as a community board room. The

rustic space will be available to nonprofits, local groups, organizations or anyone in Greater Yarmouth, including Falmouth, Durham and North Yarmouth, that

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