

Jessica Lane and Hakim Franklin – Mt. Airy Animal Hospital



Jessica Lane, vet tech and manager, and Hakim Franklin, hospital administrator and vet tech, both long for the day that pet owners can rejoin them in the office at Mt. Airy Animal Hospital, especially for difficult situations like pet end-of-life moments. That separation is a sad but necessary reality of their new, safer curbside care protocol.

Mt. Airy Animal Hospital established curbside care in the early days of the Covid-19 lockdown. Pet owners drive their pets to the Animal Hospital and the pet is taken from their car. After the pet is seen and cared for, it is brought back to its owner waiting in their vehicle. Everyone is masked and everyone is much safer. All the information about the animal is taken over the phone but the face to face contact and human connection are missed.

Working at an animal hospital is a difficult job; it is dirty and sometimes heartbreaking. The people who choose to make this their career, like Jessica Lane, who has been at Mt. Airy Animal Hospital for 15 years, and Hakim Franklin, who has worked there for 29 years, do it because they are genuinely caring people who want to take care of animals and the people who own them. Hakim and Jessica worked 50 hours a week for a month at the beginning of this crisis to establish new safety protocols and manage scheduling disruptions so they could continue to offer care to the increasing numbers of pets adopted during the lockdown. Jessica Lane said that the Animal Hospital went from a pre-pandemic average of 100 calls a day to 300 calls, and that appointments have been booked out a month in advance since April. All those new pet owners managed, at one point during lockdown, to empty local animal shelters. One blessing of this moment is that folks have found that they have more time at home and have felt called to give their time and love to a new pet.

Of course, Lane and Franklin have pets at home. Jessica has two cats, Marley and Grace, and a pet turtle, Hudson. She has been reducing stress by riding with her husband on his new pandemic purchase: a motorcycle. Hakim Franklin has two dogs, Jasmine and Oliver, and is also a single father of three children. For Hakim's youngest, his five year old daughter, these last six months have already been a significant portion of her life. She is adjusting and happy, so Hakim is happy.

Jessica and Hakim's advice for new or prospective pet owners is to do their homework on the responsibilities of pet ownership in general and those specific to type and breed. Cats and dogs, especially puppies, are a considerable commitment of time, effort, and money. They also suggest that dog owners returning to work start spending some time away from the home to help the dog adjust and not experience sudden separation anxiety. Jessica and Hakim's lives revolve around caring: caring for animals, for pet owners, for their staff, for their family, and for the community. Veterinarians, and those who work with them, are essential members of our public health system in their role of defending the public from animal diseases as well as strengthening the human animal bond.