

Meet Dr. Russell Johnson, Therapet's Vet

Johnson Dedicates 20+ Years to Therapet

THERAPET VETERINARIAN PROFILE

Dr. Russell Johnson dedicates his expertise, and his Horizon Animal Hospital's bilingual staff and resources, to providing that care for most of Therapet's program pets. After more than 20 years partnering with Therapet, the 1984 Texas A&M veterinary graduate and native El Pasoan counts many Therapet clients among some of his most stellar professional experiences.

"They're a real joy to be around, and its so much fun to visit with them and learn their histories," said Dr. Johnson. "They have so many wonderful stories to share. Many are widowed or do not have family around, so their lives are their pets."

Raised in the Valley, Dr. Johnson spent much time at his grandparents' dairy farm, where he knew he wanted to work with animals. After graduating from Ysleta High, he studied for eight years at A&M before coming home to start his career.

During summers while attending undergraduate studies, Dr. Johnson worked for Dr. Johnny Lynch as a technician/assistant at the former Buena Vista Veterinary Clinic, about a quarter-mile from where his Horizon Blvd. hospital now stands. There he worked with Dr. Barbara Crews, now owner of Crossroads Animal Hospital, who recruited him to assist Therapet years later. Dr. Johnson's first hospital started on Alameda, where he treated Therapet clients in Central and the Lower Valley. Later on, Northeast was added. When he reestablished his practice on Horizon because of the area's veterinary needs, his Therapet scope expanded even further.

Dr. Johnson formerly utilized a truck with a mobile veterinary unit for animal testing and treatment. Eventually, that became too time consuming because, as he recalls, you can't be two places at once. Today his full-service daily practice includes performing ultrasound consultations at his clinic for cases in El Paso and Las Cruces. He now provides most of Therapet pet care in clients' homes, using carriers for transportation to/from the clinic only as necessary.

For many years, Dr. Johnson's mom, Maria Luisa, volunteered her time to support his practice. From daily operations to countless in-home visits with him

for Therapet and others, Maria Luisa made priceless friendships with clients across the county. Raised in Mexico she was bilingually fluent, but when she moved to the west side of El Paso, Dr. Johnson said it became logistically difficult for him to pick her up and take her home after Therapet house calls.

"Clients still talk about her and ask for her," said Program Coordinator Susie Yglecias. "She was raised in our clients' era and related so well to them. Maria Luisa served as an amazing liaison and expanded companionship for many of our elderly shut-ins. She's greatly missed."

Dr. Johnson credits Charlotte Macias with managing 90 percent of the Therapet care load as his office manager and veterinary technician for 21 years. "It takes a lot of work to stay on top of the details for every client and client pet, but she's done it since Therapet's inception. It's such a worthy project, because without it so many elderly could not keep their pets. It means the world to them to have Therapet's help."

Macias admits that sometimes the situations are challenging. "We have great conversations with clients, because sometimes they call us direct," she said. "Our work with them is extremely rewarding. Some get so worried if their pet sneezes or coughs. Sometimes they panic, but it's so understandable. Their fears are quite real, as their pets are what keep them going."

Dr. Johnson's own Clint household consists of four-legged "kids," with numerous dogs and cats comprising his hospital and home families, along with wife Dr. Dolores Craig, a veterinarian who commutes daily to her practice in Las Cruces.

"It's a privilege to work with Therapet's clients and pets," said Dr. Johnson. "These furry companions are their family and we strive to ensure they get to share as many quality-filled years together as possible."

For more information about Therapet, its program, qualifications, volunteer opportunities or to make donation inquiries, please call our Program Coordinator at (915) 581-3789.