



Seniors & Dogs: Conversation with a Pet Expert – Senior Care Corner Show Transcript

Barry: Welcome to the Senior Care Corner Show. I'm Barry.

Kathy: And I'm Kathy. Thanks for joining us.

Barry: You'll find us online at SeniorCareCorner.com; a resource for family caregivers and other loved ones of senior adults.

Well Kathy, our regular listeners probably felt like we went away on holiday hiatus. You know we've been gone for a while just like their favorite TV shows. I think while we wanted to tell them today is that we've been evaluating the show based on the feedback we've gotten and rather than record one every two weeks, we've decided to use it when we have content that's best delivered in this way, make it most valuable for the extra time that people have to listen. We're going to look at not only the show but also our videos and our blog posts and try to deliver information in the way that's most valuable to you. Now we'll be using future shows just as this one right here to bring you interviews with experts that we think provide valuable information and when we have some insights that maybe take a little bit longer than a blog post.

And today we do have a very special expert, someone who's got a lifelong experience working with pets and the people they own. And we'll get to that in just a few minutes as well as something that's a first for us, a guest quick tip. But Kathy, before we get to all that I believe you have some news items for us?

Kathy: Indeed I do Barry. I have a few very interesting news tidbits. The first one:

Computer Games May Help Older Adults Walk Easier

A new study for the Center for Research on Health and Aging at the University of Illinois at Chicago reports that older adults who tried brain training computer games had better gait and balance than their peers.

Walking requires thinking. It's been proposed that slipping and falling in older adults is a result of not only physical frailty but also mental aging as well.

The study participants had an average age of 83. They were asked to play specific computer brain games.

Those playing computer based brain training games for 10 weeks had a slower decline in balance and walking speed decline. They showed a slight increase in the speed of walking and getting up from a seated position compared to prior to the game playing.

The games played were designed to train visual and spatial memory and quick decision making skills.

When a senior walks down a street they have to identify cracks or other tripping hazards in the sidewalk while tuning out the distractions, watching traffic signals and just seeing where the cars are. This can be an overwhelming task for seniors resulting in falls.

A good training is one that continually challenges the user. The best way to enable improved cognitive aging is by regularly challenging your brain.

Barry: Very interesting Kathy. So walking is more than just exercise?

Kathy: Yeah, who would have thought you had to think to walk?

Barry: Laughs.

Kathy: Our next news item is:

Driving Program Puts Older Vets at Ease

Many older adults are dependent on others to drive them where they need to go especially doctors' appointments.

Veterans now have another option in a new program called Vets Driving Vets which is available in Florida.

The group matches veterans who volunteer their services for other veterans, old or young, who need rides to doctors' visits or other places to help them meet their basic needs.

This service is free to the veterans. Donations are accepted to help support the program however.

Some vets gave up driving as they age due to poor eyesight or other physical disabilities which makes it unsafe for them to drive. They often have difficulty finding someone to help with transportation but this program pairs them up with others who want to help their veteran comrades.

The veterans must be able to get in and out of the car without assistance and give a seven days' notice when requesting transportation.

Not only do the veterans get a ride but they also get the camaraderie of spending time with other veterans and a chance for much needed socialization according to the program director.

It also gives the volunteer veteran a chance to give back to others in need.

Barry, this sounds like a great opportunity for older people but also the volunteer veteran. We hope this idea catches on in other states as well!

Barry: Really? And not only with veterans but seems like there's applications in other areas as well where people with common interests can get together to provide each other with a little bit of help.

Kathy: Good point. Alright, our third news article:

Heartening Drop in Diabetes Complications Seen Among Seniors

Complications from diabetes such as heart attacks, strokes, and amputations in older adults have markedly decreased according to a recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association Internal Medicine.

Compared to the 1990s, the event rates of these complications has gotten a lot better.

Hypoglycemia or low blood sugar which is a side effect of medications for diabetes is now the top problem seen in seniors with diabetes.

These findings are based on following more than 72,000 adults over 60 with type 2 diabetes. The US population is estimated to have about 23 million people suffering from type 2 diabetes half of which are over age 60.

Complications generally get worse as people age and were more severe the longer someone had diabetes. This study found the biggest decline in complication rates in heart disease but also high blood sugar episodes and the number of amputations have declined.

The treatment of diabetes has improved so much according to this researcher that it is now correlated with low blood sugar to the point that it is the third most common nonfatal complication of diabetes for those over 70 with long term diabetes.

Hypoglycemia is a side effect of therapy and is now more common than kidney failure or amputation in diabetics.

The study found that the older diabetics may be continuing to take the same medication that they always took even though their lifestyle is completely different especially how much they eat.

Barry this should remind us all especially those with diabetes to ask the doctor about their current medications every time they visit and be sure they're on the right and the most appropriate drugs and medicines to prevent low blood sugar.

Barry: That's true and it's a reminder that things do change and thoughts about disease changes as well. And not only ask the doctors these things but be sure we see the doctor on a regular basis.

Kathy: That's right. Our last news item today:

Being Web Savvy Tied to Better Health in seniors

A new study published in Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention found that older men and women who use the internet frequently are more likely to have a lifestyle that included cancer preventative benefits.

Compared to other adults in their age group, those online seniors were screened for colorectal cancer more often, and were more likely to be physically active, ate a more healthy diet and smoked less. The more time spent online, the more likely these seniors engaged in healthy behaviors.

Occasional internet users were found to participate in healthy behaviors but consistent users were even more likely to make their health a priority.

This study had over 6000 participants including men and women over 50 who were monitored every two years from 2002 to 2011.

Surveyors found that it is important that policy makers understood the role that internet use can play in disease prevention lifestyle choices and should try to close any gaps related to disparities and meet the needs of more seniors who currently have no internet access.

Barry: That's very interesting so one more benefit of the internet and I wonder how that will play out with younger generations who are growing up online.

Kathy: Interesting point.

Barry: Well thanks Kathy, great news items as always, one thing that hasn't changed from the very beginning of the show.

It's time now for our feature segment. And we talk often about how having pets around, especially dogs, can be very beneficial to our senior loved ones particularly those that are living on their own at home. We are very fortunate to be able to bring to you a conversation we had recently with Steve Appelbaum, who is- I say a lifelong expert working with pets and the people who love them. And you know as we like to say, the people who belong to them.

Steve is director of Animal Behavior College and he's President and CEO of Animal Behavior and Training Associates. We think you'll find this very interesting, so why don't we jump right in?

Begin recording

We have with us today Steve Appelbaum, President of Animal Behavior College and somebody we thought might be very informative to family caregivers. Welcome to Senior Care Corner Steve! We're glad you could join us!

Steve: Well thank you. It's a real pleasure to be here.

Barry: Sounds like you've been working with dogs or actually animal lovers for some time. Can you talk a little bit about your background?

Steve: Yeah, I've been working with dogs and the people that love them basically my entire adult life. I was an SP canine handler in the air force back after the end of World War I; no I'm kidding about that!

Kathy and Barry: Laugh

Steve: In the-- I was released from service in the early '80's and started a training business then and through a combination of circumstances was able to see that business grow to pretty good success level started the school in 1998 as a way of finding trainers for my original business; realized pretty quickly that training people to become dog trainers was a very rewarding and good business. And the school took off and it's been an amazing journey ever since. So I've really been in the pet business for over 30 years.

And I've had the opportunity to work with every recognized AKC breed, and gosh that's probably 10,000 dogs all totaled over the years. I've seen lots of different situations with dogs and I think I have some fairly good ideas as to how you can have the best possible relationship with them.

Barry: Sounds like you have had the unique opportunities in life to actually work with people who were following their passion.

Steve: Yes. Yes. We found fairly early; you know it's funny it was an unintentional-unintended consequence kind of a thing. When we started the school back in 1998, it really was with an idea to simply assist in the staffing of our first business but we found very quickly that not everybody that was interested in going to the school wanted to work for my company, most of them wanted to go into business for themselves and they were all extraordinarily passionate about getting out there in the world and making a difference. And that has- that has never changed. And that by the way cuts across all the different programs we offer; while we started the school as a school to teach people to become professional dog trainers.

In 2008, we launched a program for veterinary assistance that has done extraordinarily well; in fact right now and for the last two years that program has become the most popular of our programs. We also have a program for professional groomers that we launched in 2010. So last year we had about 4500 students take all of our programs. And so it's a wonderful thing. It's wonderful to see people that really want to make a difference and to be able to fulfill their dreams.

Kathy: That's great to hear that you're teaching professionals how to care for our pets for us.

Steve: Yes.

Barry: And how to teach us!

Steve: It really does boil down onto people training more than anything else.

Barry: We understand through some discussions we've had and through experience that seniors and other older adults have in particular have a special kind of bond with pets and have actually been shown to gain some health benefits by owning and interacting with them. Do you have experience with that?

Steve: I do! I do. And it is definitely something that all seniors should be aware of. Not all seniors may want to get a pet. But there is there is a correlation some health benefits and pet ownership. I've seen studies that suggest that, while certainly not a cure, there is some assistance for early Alzheimer's patients. That is early Alzheimer's patients in the early part of the disease actually have shown greater levels of cognition when they have pets as opposed to not having pets. That was actually a fairly controversial thing.

Beyond that though, they've been shown to lower blood pressure and stress. But I think the most important benefit is; one of the things that sometimes happens with seniors is they can become very disconnected. And this is especially true if they're not living in a senior community. Pets are a phenomenal way to become reconnected with other people.

Taking the dog for a walk, you're likely to meet other pet owners. That's a very very important for all people, especially seniors; to remain involved, to make new social

connections and to also get exercise. You know just taking the dog for a walk a couple of times a week can do- can have tremendous health benefits for seniors.

So they're they're wonderful wonderful additions to the family that all seniors should consider. And that's not just dogs, its cats too. Although cats represent a slightly different dynamic; you're not typically going to take them for walks. But they can also show tremendous benefits.

Barry: You know it's interesting we talk about, everything that today is social media, social networking; we tend to forget that just getting out there and interacting with people is the original social networking.

Steve: Yes. Now that's absolutely true! And remember also that while there are certainly any number of seniors that do engage in social media, I mean, I always laugh because I'm one of probably about 11 people in the United States that doesn't have a Facebook page. But my dad, whose 82 years old has one.

Barry: Laughs.

Steve: Now there are lots of people who really embrace social media but there are for a variety of reasons a number of seniors that still haven't. And so this, this does represent the, as you put it the "original social media", the ability to go out and actually meet people in the real world. And it's just a good thing to be able to do even if you are actively engaged in social media because getting out and meeting people in real life is; there is no substitute for that plus the act of getting out, the act of moving, the act of becoming a little bit more active is a real health benefit or can be.

Kathy: Um, Steve we know that pets really of all variety, but especially dogs are great companions and give unconditional love to seniors. Is there a particular breed or type of dog that would be better for seniors?

Steve: You know it really depends on your individual circumstance. Some seniors are more active than others, some people have greater amounts of space than others, but there are some breeds that are worth serious consideration and looks regardless.

One thing before I get into breeds, that everybody should understand. And this isn't just for seniors although it is perhaps even more important for seniors. And that is to look at your circumstances and your situation NOW not what it might have been 15 or 20 or 30 years ago and match your skill sets and your physical abilities NOW when you're making a choice for a pet especially a dog.

So yes, 25 or 30 years you might have had no problem handling 120 pound Rottweiler or 140 pound Alaskan Malamute both of which are fabulous dogs but today if that's going to be a handful for you, you might consider toning that down and getting a smaller dog. Breeds definitely worth mention? I'm a big fan of Poodles. They come in a variety of sizes. They are fairly low maintenance; don't require tremendous amounts of brushing. They don't shed a lot; highly intelligent. The Standard Poodles are actually watchdogs to boot. And can be wonderful dogs.

Another breed, now this one is going to seem a little strange to people that don't have them and I will admit to being somewhat partial because this is a breed that I own but Bassett Hounds are actually a really good choice for seniors. And there's several reasons why. One because they are very easy going; relatively slow moving dogs. They don't require tremendous amounts of energy to keep up. They're absolute rock stars when you take them out. That might seem like an odd comment but since part of having a dog involves the social interaction that comes with having a dog; I tell you what, you take a Bassett Hound out for a walk and you are going to get attention and you're going to get people come up to you. But beyond that they're also great with grandkids. They can be, you know, extremely tolerant of everybody hanging off of them. A wonderful breed although they do require some fairly frequent bathing otherwise they get that unique hound dog smell. And they are a bit low to the ground so you worry; you have to be careful about not tripping over them.

Other dogs on the slightly smaller side that can be great for seniors-- Bichon Frises. These are wonderful little white fluffy dogs about 15 or so pounds. Hypoallergenic; which is great for those with allergies! Highly intelligent; very wonderful nice dogs.

You know those are a few, those are certainly a few that come to mind. There are; there are many. And what I would suggest anybody looking for a dog do is first off Google "great dogs for seniors". And there is a TON of information available in which you can look at different breeds and sort of match what the breed was bred to do to your specific lifestyle.

There's also a great book, you know if you're not into the whole internet thing called **The Right Dog for You**. It's still in print. It's been around for about 25 years. It's written by Dan Tortora (T-o-r-t-o-r-a). And that book takes all the different recognized breeds and it breaks them down into categories so you can see whether the dog is typically very energetic; how social the dog is. Whether the dog tends to be inclined towards dominant personality or they're really easy going. Essentially, you can just match it to your lifestyle. I know it's cliché but this one is definitely worth investing a little bit of time and before you invest a little bit of money and a LOT more time because God willing you could have this dog for the next 10 or 15 years.

Barry: We'll put that book title in the show notes there so anyone who's listening doesn't have to worry about scrambling for a piece of paper. I really liked what you said; I hadn't thought about the Bassett Hound but I guess one of the questions/concerns we have is kind of the same safety associated with a dog. That would seem like one wouldn't easily get under foot and cause tripping or anything.

Steve: Well you know people are surprised. Bassett Hounds can be pretty big dogs. You know they can go; the males can go 60-70-80 pounds. So they're; they're pretty stocky thick set dogs. But they're not; they're not the typical darting under foot getting in the way kind of dogs.

You know look, there is a certain level of physical ability that you will need to possess in order to safely have a dog. Ideally you should have the ability to take the dog for a walk. You don't have to go long distances. And you can start off a quarter mile, maybe a half

mile, work up to a mile two or three times a week which is within the range of most people. That's wonderful.

You can also teach dogs to walk next to you in a wheelchair or a scooter. So just as long as you can get the dog out and get the dog some exercise. And get yourself some exercise, that's great.

The ability to ideally pick the dog up and put the dog in a vehicle; granted most dogs will be able to jump into a vehicle pretty easily unless they're injured and you have to take the dog to the vet. Of course, you might be able to get help doing this. But ideally if you have the ability to physically control the dog at that level that's—that's important.

Other than that, really just the ability, you don't have to have great eyesight although it certainly helps. You don't have to have great hearing but there too it certainly helps. Really just to understand that the dog will be dependent on you and you'll need a level of sensory awareness to be able to fulfill what the dog's needs will be; to know when the dog is thirsty, to know when the dog is hungry, to know when the dog has to go out, so on and so forth.

Cats are a little bit less demanding or needy. But you'll certainly still need to be able to care for them as well. You won't have to typically take them for walks, although people have certainly trained their cats to go for walks. You—just the ability to pick the cat up and to be able to feed and care for the cat is obviously important. So it doesn't require huge amounts of physical prowess but it certainly does require some.

Kathy: So I imagine Steve the book you were mentioning would also guide the seniors and their family caregivers for particular dogs in what level of medical care they might need; what kind of health concerns a particular breed would have so they can kind of be aware and be on the watch for what kind of needs they need to have met.

Steve: Less that, there's certainly some of that. But the book is—that book is really focused primarily matching typical breed characteristics to your lifestyle. You know as far as the medical considerations of certain individual breeds; once you've identified a breed that you like it's fairly easy to do a little bit more research on that particular breed. Again, if you're, you know, internet savvy as certainly most people are today, you can very easily as much information as you can possibly use on every conceivable breed just by doing internet search and a little research there. There are tons of books on every conceivable breed as well. And so, you can, you can make the determination at that point as to whether there are medical considerations.

You know I remember as a trainer I would occasionally run into people that had very small dogs, you know Yorkshire Terriers, Silky Terriers. And every now and then I would get somebody that would say "wow this dog is so much different than the last dog I had". And I would always bite and say "well what was the last—what was last dog you had?"

Barry and Kathy: Laughs.

Steve: I can't tell you a least a dozen times I got the response, "Well I had a Mastiff", "I had a Great Dane".

Barry: Laughs.

Steve: You know I'd look at them initially and go "OK wow, that's a HUGE difference. What made you—what made you, you know; go for such a different breed?" And inevitably the same answer came up. And that was you know with the giant breeds they couldn't deal with the heartbreak. You know Great Danes oftentimes don't live beyond 8-9-10 years of age. And it was just so traumatic for people that have those dogs that instead they decided to get a much smaller breed that typically live a lot longer. So, little things like that to know what the average lifespans are. What some of the considerations, medical considerations are. One of the challenges with Bassett Hounds is they sometimes do have back problems as very elongated dogs are sometimes inclined to have. Dachshunds have much the same challenge. So...

Barry: We learned that the hard way.

Steve: Yeah, I did too unfortunately. And you know that's certainly something to be aware of which is why, again it's best to do a little bit of research and people can take—if they can take away one thing from this discussion we're having; it's understand that yes it's absolutely possible and a great idea for you to consider a pet, but you want to do a little research to really match your lifestyle as it is today and where it's likely to be for the foreseeable future with that of the specific breed that you're looking for. Do your homework. Hopefully this helps you a little bit and you're likely to have a wonderful experience for the next decade and a half or so.

Barry: Well it's interesting you mention the time that someone might have a pet. You know we talk a lot to our family caregivers about looking for signs when they visit their senior loved ones that they might need a little more help that they might not be taking care of themselves. As people age they go through a transition, at one time they might have been very able to take care of themselves and less so over time. And what should family caregivers look for in the pets of their loved ones to make sure that the pets are getting proper care?

Steve: Much the—much similar kinds of things. You know if you come in and the dog is obviously thirsty or looking emaciated. If the dog doesn't look particularly healthy; the coat is extremely matted and dirty. You know beyond which is what would be "normal", really just changes in pattern, routine examination shows there's not even any dog food in the house. Really the kind of obvious stuff, running sores on the dog or any kind of medical condition that appears to exist for a while and does not appear to be getting treated. Things like that.

Barry: Interesting so I guess really is a lot the same observation we'd do with our loved ones, of course dogs they are really just another loved one in the home.

Steve: They are! You know most care givers are not pet experts, some are but it's a lot of this that you don't have to be a veterinarian to identify changes in pattern. And that's really what you're looking for; you know you come in and everything is right. The dog seems healthy. The people that you're visiting seem healthy. You know there's food in the house. The place is relatively clean. You know and it's—if that starts to deteriorate and the

dog no longer looks as healthy, again, there's no food there's no water, there's an obvious medical condition that one doesn't have to be a veterinarian to see. I mean that's a reasonable place to start.

Barry: Do you see any issues for, you know a senior who hasn't had a dog in their life and getting one. I mean is it something that family members should get their loved one a little training and caring for a pet. I mean where would they turn?

Steve: Yeah. Well there are a couple of—couple of things about that question. The first is you know as a senior, really that's anybody that's looking to get a pet the question is where do you get a dog or where do you get a cat? More and more people, myself included, have suggested and suggested for many years now that you really want to consider adoption. And there are a number of reasons why, I mean aside from the fact that you're helping to save a life and give a pet a forever home is puppyhood can be a very trying and difficult time. And so you might want to ask the senior whether or not they have the energy or desire to deal with essentially a two year old on four legs; which is what you've got when you've got a ten week old puppy running around the house going to the bathroom all the place chewing everything up. So you MIGHT consider getting a dog of say a year or two or three from a rescue that's past the first and second flush of youth. It's just easier. And again you're able to save a life.

Kathy: That's a good point. Good point.

Steve: Adopt, adopt with a rescue and adopt. As far as training goes, ABSOLUTELY! Training especially and you know you're going to find, that's obviously not with people that have never had a dog before but with people that have had dogs their whole life. When you mention training some of them will go "Oh I've done that I don't need to do it again". Training isn't just about learning for the first time how to teach dogs the important commands or sometimes called "cues" that they need to know. It's getting out there, it's experiencing it with a group of other people, again there's that social element, and it's doing it in a progressive guided fashion that allows for better results. Which is just a long winded way of saying even if you know how to do it; it's a good idea to take a class because it will make it easier for you to remember and to get it done properly.

As far as where to find trainers, my school has a trainer base, a "Find a Trainer" base which you can find on our website. And there are any number of places where you can find trainers including, you know your local veterinarian you can ask them for a referral; pet stores and so on and so forth. And I would encourage people to check out our website because we do have a trainer database of our graduates and since we have students in all 50 states and every Canadian province; there's likely to be a graduate of our school practicing their trade near you.

Kathy: Well thank you Steve that's great information. We'll be sure to include your website so people can find a locator of a credentialed trainer in their area. We appreciate your time and your expertise.

Steve: It's my...



Barry: You know this has been very enlightening.

Steve: Well thank you.

Barry: Learned a lot ourselves here.

Steve: I appreciate that. It's a pleasure. It's—it's very important. We've had a lot of success with not only seniors owning dogs but we actually have a percentage of our student body that's over 55 that you know has done well in their first careers and have decided for a variety of reasons that they want to devote the rest of their working energies and time to fulfilling their dream. And so we've had a number of seniors take out program and become certified dog trainers or certified veterinary assistants and even groomers which is great!

Barry: Would there be any information on your website if someone had that interest as well?

Steve: Absolutely!

Barry: And we'll point that out there! Really thank you for spending time with us today. We know you're busy but this has been extremely helpful and we know that family caregivers who listen to this will find this helpful as well.

Steve: Never too busy for this, call me anytime!

Barry: Thank you very much and we hope you have a great day.

Steve: Alright. Thank you.

End Recording

Barry: We appreciate Steve joining us and look forward to maybe touching base with him in the future. As we mentioned links his website and other information you'll find in the show notes today.

Kathy: Well Barry I found him to have a great deal of expertise to offer to pet owners and care givers responsible for those pets.

Barry: Yeah he really had some great insights. I'm glad that we were able to bring him to everyone. And now it's time for yet one more treat. Usually Kathy brings our quick tip but within our theme today of pets and particularly dogs we thought we'd bring you a special quick tip from Christina Booker, the General Manager of FromOurDogstoYours.com.

Start Recording

Kathy: Hello Christina. Thanks for joining us. We understand you have a quick tip for us today?

Christina: I sure do! Today's quick tip is called:

Caring for Your Senior's Pet



We all want to care for our pets so they stay healthy all year long especially as seniors and their pet's age!

February is National Pet Dental Month so let's talk about proper dental care of our dogs. We can keep our pets healthy with good mouth care.

1. If your dog has bad breath it might be a sign of trouble. Dogs have a distinctive breath odor, when it gets really bad it could be periodontal disease that should be checked by your vet. They may need a professional cleaning.
2. Brush your pet's teeth regularly with dog toothpaste not your own which can irritate their stomach. Use a soft bristle toothbrush that is pet friendly and specially formulated pet toothpaste. Both of which are available in our pet store at FromOurDogstoYours.com.
3. If your dog is hesitant to allow you to brush his teeth, you can use a dental spray or additives in their water bowl to prevent decay and help keep teeth clean.
4. Give your pet specially designed dental chews or chew toys to help clear off plaque and they can have fun while they're doing it!

The more often you brush your pets' teeth, the healthier they will be!

End Recording

Barry: Well that was a great tip Christina! Thank you for joining us and your link information will be in our show notes as well!

And we appreciate everybody joining us here for this episode. We hope it's been worth waiting for and we hope you'll come back for more. And in the meantime keep an eye on us at SeniorCareCorner.com or on Facebook at Senior Care Corner. And until we see you again, we hope you have a great day!