

Meet our Head Vet Tech, Michelle Boniface, CVT



Michelle started work at Animal Care Clinic in April of 2001. She began her career in veterinary medicine as a kennel tech and then quickly moved up the ranks into the position of veterinary technician. She earned her license as a Certified Veterinary Technician in 2009 and became the Head Technician at ACC. She enjoys nursing, geriatric care, physical therapy, and dentistry.

Michelle, you came to Animal Care Clinic from a completely different career path. How did you end up in the field of veterinary medicine?

As a kid I thought about becoming a vet because I always had a special connection with animals. One day as I was walking to school, I came across a horribly suffering cat that had been hit by a car but was still clinging to life. It really traumatized me and made me doubt that I would "have the stomach" to deal with a scenario like that as a vet.

Although I continued to love animals intensely, I switched my education and career plans to more "mainstream" subjects. After *many* years of corporate management positions (that I mostly enjoyed) it became obvious to me that I needed to find some kind of work with animals. I needed to work in a job where my heart lay, where I could really feel that I had made a difference at the end of the day!

You have seen a lot of changes to the clinic over the years. In your opinion, what are some of the most important improvements that you have witnessed?

THE ADVANCEMENT OF PAIN CONTROL PROTOCOLS! Our clinic has always been ahead of the veterinary curve in terms of avoiding and/or managing pain for our patients. Lots of continuing education combined with staff observations of our own pets means we've been able to really focus on saving animals from unnecessary pain--whether it's post-surgical or a chronic condition like arthritis.

As time has passed have your interests in veterinary medicine changed?

Yes. With the vast improvements in veterinary healthcare, we are seeing many animals live much longer lives. Getting old isn't a disease. It's a natural progression of life. As healthcare professionals we have so many tools to keep our loved pets comfortable as they age. We can help them maintain a very nice quality of life. Geriatric and rehabilitative issues are very important to me.

You have pets at home - can you give us a rundown?

Flash, a 5 year old Mini Australian Shepherd that is my first ever "small" (22 lbs) dog. Every day of his life is a party--talk about living in the moment! He rocked at agility classes - although I pretty much got turned around and lost on the course. I love him dearly.

Two cats - Romey, a 14 year old orange tabby....always one of those really mellow, gentle kitties. Although 14 isn't that old, I have to say he's been running and climbing the cat-tree a lot more since I got him on the J/D joint diet. Love it! Suli is a one year old brown tabby with long hair (my very first pet I brought home from the clinic after nine years. Talk about willpower!) She's a beautiful girl, a hellion - but can be exceptionally sweet. Enough said. :)

How has having pets at home affected how you do your job? For example, you dealt in depth with diabetes when your own cat was diagnosed with the disease years ago.

Diabetes is such a scary disease, but one that can often be well managed in cats and dogs. When my cat, Bunley, became extremely obese around the age of 9, he became diabetic. (Embarrassingly, I had been in total denial about his obesity...."He's just a big cat--maybe part Maine Coon...blah, blah, blah.") However, we managed his diabetes with diet and insulin for another 6 years and he did very well. He's somewhat of a legend around the clinic...he had a very "strong personality." Miss him so much.

Hussy was always my special friend - a female orange tabby (they're kinda rare). She passed away at 19 years of age. Caring for Hussy encouraged me to learn even more about hyperthyroidism and kidney disease, which are both very common - and treatable - conditions in older kitties. Do annual bloodwork! The sooner we can catch these problems the easier they are to manage!

In 2009 you took the Veterinary Technician National Examination (VTNE). You passed and became a Certified Veterinary Technician (CVT). Has that changed how you see your job and/or how you approach your responsibilities at the clinic?

Earning that license *did* give me an increased feeling of confidence and pride in my job. It was a very difficult exam. My college degrees did not really pertain to what I needed to know to pass. Not to mention, college was a long time ago! Lots of continuing education courses, invaluable thousands of hours of in-clinic experience, and a *ton* of studying were required.

There are some procedures that by law can only be provided by licensed techs. But I have to say I work with some *exceptionally* skilled, educated, and dedicated technicians - even though they may have chosen not to go through the licensing process.

What do you think is the hardest part of your job?

When I feel a pet has a lot of quality life left and, for a variety of reasons, the owner cannot or will not be able to provide the care needed to achieve this.

Also, the proliferation of pet info out there can be difficult to maneuver. Breeders, the internet, pet-food reps, pet-stores etc. are often a good source of information. Sometimes though, I feel their best intentions do not result in the best care for the pet. When you find a clinic with doctors and medical staff that you trust, please consider the extensive schooling they have gone through when considering options for your much-loved pet.

And last, what are some of the things you like the best about being a vet tech?

Every employee here loves their own furry family AND your furry family and truly wants the best for you and yours. I've never had the pleasure of working with a group that is more dedicated and compassionate.