

The Animal Whisperer

By Kevin Fritz

Jo Maldonado introduces Seminole County to a new organization to improve the health and well-being of pets—and their owners.

Having a special rapport with animals is a Tarzan-esque trait innate to select homo sapiens. Some who come to mind are the wildly famous dog whisperer Cesar Millan and Jane Goodall, the chimp researcher. Their work offers us the courage to understand that, yes, some of us can relate on a higher level with the animal kingdom and “talk” to the animals.

Jo Maldonado of **Longwood** and her new non-profit organization, the **Center for Animal Therapies (CAT)**, can also be added to that list. CAT now makes it possible for pet owners, students of animal studies and the public at large to learn just what makes our furry friends tick.

Pet Assistance

By studying an animal’s energy, its behavior and its physical well being, Maldonado says, people can better care for their own pets as well as those running free in nature. Indeed, if a dog is suffering from allergies, a cat is more finicky than normal or birds are suddenly swarming in your backyard, CAT may be able to help Central Floridians listen to what they are trying to say.

Maldonado, who has been operating a successful public relations agency for eight years in the Orlando area, says her new role fulfills a deep passion for animal welfare. One catalyst for founding CAT was Bertolucci, Maldonado’s white Pyrenees dog. When she brought Bertolucci to a veterinarian, she felt she was steered awry by the vet. To her horror, her beloved pooch went into liver shock and developed staphylococcus aureus (staph) infection. (He’s fine now.)



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Jo Maldonado, founder of Center for Animal Therapies, “reads” animals at Pet Rescue by Judy in Sanford to determine their pain and stress levels.

“I thought there should be a program so people don’t have to go to the vet blind,” she says. That’s when she decided to develop CAT so that owners could be more attuned to what’s going on with their pets. “It’s not to replace a vet,” she explains, “but to assist the pet owner.”

Long term, the end reward is even more altruistic. “The more people learn about their pets, the less need there will be for shelters,” she says. “If owners understood what was going on and had a solution, they would keep their pets.” Sadly, many animals end up at shelters simply because owners can’t understand their behavior.



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The Whisperers

To bring some relief to Seminole County and Orlando-area pet owners, Maldonado has surrounded herself with the best in the field. CAT has animal nutritionists, behavioral specialists, spiritual healers and trained veterinarians on board.

Renowned animal communicator and Reiki teacher Beth Zarzycki participated in a workshop last month for CAT. She offered a beginner’s class to energy healing through Reiki. Reiki is a technique for stress reduction and relaxation in which you place a warm palm on specific areas of a pet’s body to promote healing. Used on humans and animals, Reiki works in conjunction with all other medical or therapeutic techniques to relieve side effects of illness or stress and promote recovery.

To practice what she preaches, Maldonado has become a certified Reiki level two practitioner. She is also a student of Shamanic healing—a method used for the interaction with animals—and other intuitive processes such as animal communication.

“I studied healing so I could understand what I was going to offer through the center,” she says. “Then I got good at it.” In fact, she got so good that she now “reads” animals at the Pet Rescue by Judy in **Sanford** to determine if and where they are experiencing pain and their level of distress.

At present, CAT has held about a half dozen workshops thus far at three locations. Maldonado says her ultimate goal is to build a permanent location featuring a veterinarian and dog trainer on premises and enough acreage to have a sanctuary for wildlife. **L**

Find out more about the Center for Animal Therapies
at CentralFlorida-Lifestyle.com.