

# Sue Hawkins talks on Hydrotherapy

By Ann Evans Photos courtesy of Paul Vokes and Ruth Downey

**Hydrotherapy – or water healing, is probably the oldest form of medical treatment known to man. Basically, it's the use of water for soothing and healing, and it's been around for thousands of years.**

Ancient Romans had communal baths for its citizens, Egyptian royals bathed with essential oils and flowers, the ancient Greeks enjoyed therapeutic baths.

While water treatment has been around for centuries, its benefits are being appreciated these days not just for people but for animals too. Equine and canine hydrotherapy is widely used to help heal all kinds of ailments.

A leading light in the world of canine hydrotherapy is Nuneaton woman, and former Coventry and Warwickshire Businesswoman of the Year, Sue Hawkins.

Sue has built up her hydrotherapy and training centre just outside Nuneaton, which provides training for people involved in animal care. Her students come from all over the world to attend, many of them are professionals in the animal world and include vets, therapists and alternative therapists.

When Sue first got into hydrotherapy more than ten years ago, her biggest concern was the fact that although people could buy hydrotherapy pools, training in its proper use was nowhere to be found. So she set about creating those training opportunities.

Dogs Monthly visited Sue at the Hawksmoor Centre for Excellence, which she has built around her home, and discovered alongside her family of much loved Golden Retrievers,



Sue and pets

her well-staffed kennels, a feng shui'd cattery, a beautiful converted barn which she has turned into a conference centre, plus the hydrotherapy centre, all set within the peaceful countryside of Warwickshire.

Training was still uppermost on her mind we discovered, as we chatted to Sue.

"When I first bought my hydrotherapy unit I was very concerned that there was no training to be had anywhere," she said. "The thing is, hydrotherapy units don't need qualified staff to run. I was fortunate in knowing a vet who had been using hydrotherapy for some time, and he trained me in its correct use and how to maintain the pool and so on. But I knew other people might not be so fortunate.

"We had always done NVQ training for young people to learn about animal care here at Hawksmoor, so I devised a training programme for hydrotherapy."

Her initial course was a two day course called An Introduction to Hydrotherapy, which gave people a basic understanding. From there she identified a need for more in depth training and so went on to expand her training programmes.

She now runs one and two day hydrotherapy related training courses leading to recognised certification. Her courses are



Sue Hawkins and Mollie

approved by the Canine Hydrotherapy Association (CHA). And eight are also externally accredited by ABC which is an awarding body.

"Most of the colleges in the country are now putting on courses, and they have all been on our courses to start with," she added. "I just want to teach people to do things correctly for the benefit of the animals."

It's all a far cry from the early days of Sue's life with animals, when she moved into her house with just a dream of running a boarding kennel. With the house in virtually a derelict condition, and two young children to look after, Kelli and Ross, aged just five and seven at the time, they lived in just one room of the house, while Sue gradually worked on other rooms to make them liveable.

"I am a workaholic," said Sue. "I work 24/7 and I'm always thinking ahead. We began with three kennels, and just built up and built up. Then I went on to learn how to groom, which I did on the kitchen table with a hand dryer."

With a large barn on her property, Sue saw a good use for it, and transformed it into the lovely conference centre that you see today. She added, "I converted it myself, painting every one of the beams and panels. Then I renovated some upstairs rooms into offices. I just did it bit by bit. My dream was to have a really good quality boarding kennel and cattery, and we have got that - and a little bit more."

Building the hydrotherapy centre was an important addition to her home and kennels - and is something that she is delighted to have gone ahead with. Recently she has added an underwater treadmill to her facilities, which is also proving very beneficial for a whole range of canine ailments.



Don't let go



Oh, this is nice!

Her efforts were recognised in 2000 when she was awarded the title, Coventry and Warwickshire Businesswoman of the Year 2000, her business being the first kennels, cattery and hydro pool in the Midlands and only one of four in the country to have achieved the accolade of Investor in People certification.

"Hydrotherapy is so fantastic I really believe in it," added Sue. "It's just wonderful to see a dog going from being unable to walk to running excitedly down the path to see us."

The fact that hydrotherapy units can run without trained staff still concerns Sue tremendously. She stresses to anyone thinking of taking their dog for hydrotherapy sessions, that the owner should look to see what training the hydrotherapist has had.

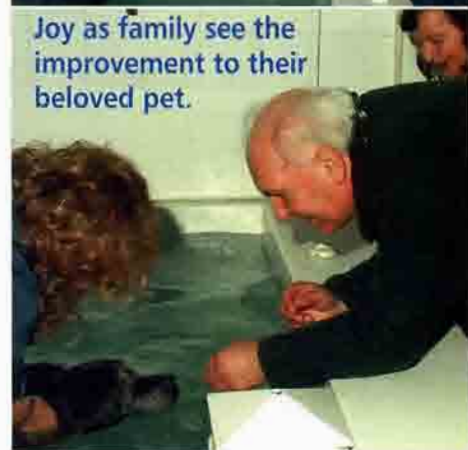
"Dog owners need to feel confident and secure in the knowledge that the people in charge know what they are doing and that their dogs are safe being put in the water."

She also stressed that before any dog has hydrotherapy treatment, even if it's just for fitness and fun, they must have a veterinary referral. "Trained staff need to know the whole medical history of the dog and whether there are any other underlying problems such as epilepsy, diabetes, ear problems and so on.

"Swimming is possibly one of the best exercises anyone can take - both for canines and humans alike. This zero impact method of exercising benefits a huge range of medical conditions. For example, pre-operative conditioning, toning and building up muscle. Also post-operative rehabilitation in cases such as cruciate repair, hip and elbow dysplasia, spinal surgery and hip replacement. It's hugely beneficial for dogs suffering from arthritis, spondylosis, nerve damage, muscle, tendon and ligament injuries. Also, obesity can also be tackled with



Teamwork



Joy as family see the improvement to their beloved pet.

hydrotherapy, while performance and stamina can be improved in older dogs through this gentle non-weight bearing, non-impact way of exercising."

For this to work effectively however, trained staff need to work out individual programmes for each dog they treat and it's definitely showing results, which can be seen in her many documented case studies and the new video she has out, showing the progress of some of her canine patients.

"We have excellent results through hydrotherapy," added Sue. "We have quadriplegic dogs, tetraplegic, paraplegic,



On with the harness



On with the harness



Into the warm air dryer



Good fun!

and we are getting them back on their feet, fit and active after the most serious of injuries or surgery. Rewards are fantastic you just cannot believe it. It can be absolutely heart warming."

When Sue isn't working, you'll find her relaxing with her Golden Retrievers, walking and showing them. She's always loved the breed and has been involved with them since the mid 70s. She recalls that she was showing her original three Golden Retrievers, Bracken, Tisha and Sophie when her daughter was just 10 days old.

Sue and has never lost her love and enthusiasm for the breed. And in fact relies on some of her dogs for assisting her in training programmes. When a dog is needed to demonstrate hydrotherapy or first aid practices, or for trainees to practice working on, there's usually a willing pet eager to join in.

Piper adores the hydrotherapy pool and is so used to being in there, that everyone stands well back as he launches himself in. But then he's just as happy to allow himself to be hoisted in and out by hydraulic hoist, and equipped with harnesses and poles so that trainees can work with him.

Likewise, Molly loves going into the conference centre to meet all the students. Sue laughed, "She looks so pleased when she sees a room full of people. It's like she's saying, Oh! There's people here, than means biscuits! She loves being involved on the course and loves being around people, although you can see it in her face at times, when students aren't bandaging her correctly - it's like she's saying, what are you messing about at? Get it right! But the dogs, like my staff, are indispensable - we're a team and I couldn't manage without them."



Hello?

## How Hydrotherapy Works

Basically, hydrotherapy increases circulation in the body. The combination of warmth hydrostatic pressure and buoyancy help to promote circulation which aids healing. The drawing of blood to and through targeted areas of the body stimulate the immune system, detoxifies the body, heals injured tissues, re-energises the body along with many other benefits. Plus the pressure of the water can have an anti-inflammatory effect, relieving pain and reducing swelling.

## How it Helps

Hydrotherapy is controlled aquatic exercise in heated sanitized water. This zero impact method of exercise benefits a huge range of medical conditions, such as:

- Pre-operative conditioning, toning and building up muscle.
- Post-operative rehabilitation in cases such as cruciate repair, hip and elbow dysplasia, spinal surgery and hip replacement.
- Arthritis.
- Spondylosis.
- Nerve damage, muscle, tendon and ligament injuries.
- Obesity.
- Performance and stamina.
- For older dogs this gentle non-weight bearing, non-impact way of exercising can be very beneficial.

**NOTE:** Hydrotherapy should only be provided for veterinary referred dogs.

## Details:

**Hawksmoor Hydrotherapy Referral Centre,**  
 Watling Street,  
 Near Nuneaton,  
 Warwickshire CV10 0TQ  
 Telephone: 024 7635 0221