

# Animal Medical Clinic

## Skilled veterinarian and her team go above and beyond, serving the homeless and their pets as well as their traditional clients

By John Downs

**T**his is the story of two women who care greatly about their community. Both Loretta Carrico, DVM, and Mariah Smith have found unique ways to help the less fortunate whenever and wherever they can.

When their paths crossed last December, a friendship was formed, and now each work together to enrich the lives of the homeless in Hampton Roads.

Dr. Loretta Carrico is a successful veterinarian and the founder of the Animal Medical Clinic on Battlefield Boulevard in Chesapeake. “Our goal always is to provide the best possible care in a pleasant and pet-friendly atmosphere,” she promises. “Our staff is composed of gentle, compassionate professionals who represent some of the most skilled and well-trained individuals in the area.”

Animal Medical Clinic proudly offers routine preventive care for pets, early detection and treatment of diseases as the pet ages, and comprehensive medical, dental, and surgical care during the pet’s lifetime. Dr. Carrico adds, “We treat your pet as we would our own. We want to be your partner for life in your pet’s health care and well-being.”

Animal Medical is designed for animal comfort. Instead of a hat rack in the waiting room, there is a leash rack on the wall. Patients visiting Animal Medical are likely to be met by Roo, a domestic short-hair cat who is usually found lounging in and around the reception desk. A wooden plaque behind the desk proclaims: “All you need is love... and a dog.”

The décor and design of the clinic is a reflection of the extreme love Dr. Carrico shows for her animal patients. Veterinary medicine was an early life calling for her. “I really can’t remember a time when I didn’t want to be a veterinarian,” she says. Dr. Carrico grew up in the humble surroundings of the mountains of Kentucky. Her parents taught her love and respect of animals through example. “My father was a very patient man and had the unique ability to connect with



*The Animal Medical Clinic team. Standing, from left: Seated, from left:*

even the most timid of animals,” Dr. Carrico recalls. “And my mother was the rescuer and nurturer of the family – including kids, pets, and all types of wildlife.”

Dr. Carrico graduated with honors from the prestigious Auburn College of Veterinary Medicine in 1990. She began her practice here in Hampton Roads and has remained for more than a quarter of a century. Her husband is retired from the United States Navy. They have two children, three grandchildren, and two dogs – Kodak and Daytona.

Animal Medical Clinic’s website is full of useful

information for pet and animal lovers. The site contains educational articles and a link to PetSite, which allows animal owners to record all sorts of useful and potentially life-saving information about their pets’ medical history. Animal Medical offers generous discounts to multi-pet owners, legitimate rescue groups, and senior citizens.

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— Valerie Harvey, RN

Valerie Harvey is a Chesapeake nurse who works in clinical research. Dr. Carrico has cared for her dog Molly for eight years. “Dr. Carrico is a very caring veterinarian,” Valerie says. “Molly is sometimes quite anxious, but Dr. Carrico’s gentle demeanor always calms her down. I have the utmost confidence in Dr. Carrico. Everyone at Animal Medical is professional and friendly, and I definitely recommend them to all pet owners.”

But Dr. Carrico’s care and compassion go far beyond her practice. She is a strong supporter of the annual Bark in the Park, a frequent guest speaker at area schools and organizations, and encourages her staff to fund a major community project each December. In past years, Animal Medical Clinic has supported



*From the pet-friendly décor to Roo the cat’s feline welcome, everything about Animal Medical Clinic speaks to the team’s great love of animals*



projects and charities which aid senior citizens, the military, children, and, of course, animals. This past December, the staff decided to help the homeless and their pets.

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It was proving to be a difficult task—until she came upon a charity called Blankets for the Homeless. Dr. Carrico got in touch with the charity's founder, Mariah Smith and, to paraphrase a quote from a classic movie: it was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

Mariah Smith was just 17 when she started Blankets for the Homeless, a registered 501(c)3 charitable organization. While most young ladies her age were thinking about prom dresses and high school graduation, Mariah was busy collecting blankets and other outdoor necessities to distribute to victims of homelessness.

It all started for her one cold winter night about five years ago: "I saw a man outside of a fast food restaurant," she says. "He was shivering and I happened to have a spare blanket in my car. The gratitude in his eyes when I gave him the blanket was enough to make me want to help others in his predicament."

Since that night, Mariah donates all of her free time to Blankets for the Homeless. Despite the demanding schedule of being a student at Regent University, she is out four to six nights a week distributing insect repellent, toiletries, clothing, bag lunches, tents, backpacks, and many other much-needed items. Her weekends are spent at different places of worship seeking support for her charity, which receives no governmental funding. Since its founding in 2011, the charity has distributed over 110,000 blankets, an equal number of bagged lunches, and countless



*Valeria Harvey, RN, has trusted Dr. Carrico with her dog's medical needs for eight years*

thousands of toiletry articles, clothing, backpacks, and tents. Mariah works out of her mother's townhouse. "Space is a problem," she admits, "We're definitely praying for some warehouse space to be donated."

Mariah Smith started out in life as a homeless person herself. She was abandoned by her birth mother as an infant. She credits her foster parents with showering her with love and hope. "My mother, Moira Askew, has given me so much love," Maria says. "She is the biggest supporter of my charitable work, and I owe her everything."

**"Mariah is one of the most amazing people I know. She is so dedicated to her charity, and works tirelessly seven days a week. She is making the world better for people who are so often forgotten or ignored."**

— Loretta Carrico, DVM

Mariah and Dr. Carrico have formed a bond of mutual love, admiration, and support.

"Dr. Carrico is one of the most caring and generous people I know," Mariah shares. "She donates her time, talent, medical supplies, and transportation to visit with the homeless and treat their pets. Some of the animals are in desperate need of medical attention and Dr. Carrico is definitely an angel of mercy."

Dr. Carrico is quick to return the compliment: "Mariah is one of the most amazing people I know. She is so dedicated to her charity, and works tirelessly seven days a week. She is making the world better for people who are so often forgotten or ignored."

Blankets for the Homeless is an award-winning organization. Coastal Virginia Magazine has honored the charity with its annual Giving Back Award. News Channel 3 gave Mariah its Humanitarian Award for 2015.

The charity's inspirational website includes Mariah's personal testimony as well as a description of the awards she has won. There are contact phone numbers and numerous videos about the charity. Blankets for the Homeless also has a presence on FaceBook: Blankets for the Homeless Hampton Roads, which showcases hundreds of pictures and descriptions of its charitable activities.

With the cold winter months on the horizon, donations are desperately needed. All donations are tax deductible but Mariah says cash donations go the farthest. "I know there are so many really good people and organizations that are willing to help," Mariah says confidently. "And I will be more than happy to speak to any business, organization, or place of worship about Blankets for the Homeless. I will even pick up donations if it is difficult to drop them off."

Dr. Carrico makes one important point about Mariah and her efforts: "Mariah is the driving force behind Blankets for the Homeless, and she needs help. Regular volunteers would take a great deal of the burden off her shoulders. Cash donations, supplies, and lunch items are also needed. She really does work out of her home and her automobile, so warehouse space would be a real blessing.



*Mariah Smith's charitable work started when she was still just a teenager; and her passion has not dimmed*

"I'm hoping there will be an outpouring of love and support for Mariah's work. So many homeless individuals, families, children, and pets depend on her. If people visit her website and listen to Mariah's video in her own words, I'm certain they'll want to help."

The many people that Mariah helps may not always remember her name, but they remember her unconditional kindness and caring attitude toward them and their pets. For Dr. Carrico and her team, helping and raising awareness for Blankets for the Homeless is just an extension of the philosophy at Animal Medical Clinic: compassionate care for their clients' furry family members.

logo

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**Blankets for the Homeless**

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