

Packer Insider



See What the "Insiders" Know

- Fan Photo Gallery
- Fan Bloggers
- Expert Analysis
- Player Development

BUSINESS

- Main Page
- Airlines
- Banking, insurance
- Economy
- Food and beverages
- Health care
- International business
- Investing, personal finance
- Manufacturing
- Real estate - commercial
- Real estate - residential
- Retailing
- Tech, telcom, cable
- Utilities
- Workplace, careers, labor

NEWS

- Main Page
- Milwaukee
- Waukesha
- Washington
- Ozaukee
- Racine
- Wisconsin
- State Politics
- Editorials
- Crossroads
- Traffic
- Education
- Obituaries

SPORTS

- Main Page
- Packers/NFL
- Packer Insider**
- Bucks/NBA
- Brewers/MLB
- Badgers
 - » Football
 - » Basketball
- Golden Eagles
- Panthers
- Preps
- Golf
- Outdoors
- Wave/Soccer
- Admirals/Hockey
- Racing

ENTERTAINMENT

- Main Page
- Dining
- Movies
- Music

JS ONLINE: BUSINESS:

E-MAIL | PRINT THIS STORY

Critter Pharmacist

When birds, dogs and cats are achy, Jeff Langer and company come to the rescue with the right mix of love and medicine

By **AVRUM D. LANK**
alank@journalsentinel.com

Posted: Mar. 12, 2006

Bayside - Rudolph, a reindeer, had a fungus.

Mr. B, a sick cat, would bite the hand of anyone trying to heal him.

Advertisement

LowerMyBills.com Bad Credit OK

And every summer, the penguins at the Milwaukee County Zoo must be protected against avian malaria.

In those cases and many more, veterinarians have sought help from Jeff Langer, a third-generation pharmacist who spends most of his time these days creating inhalers, ear gels and other medications for animals.

Soft spoken and dressed in a white lab coat, Langer, 52, runs the Pet

Apothecary LLC from a small suite in an office building on N. Port Washington Road. It is a business exclusively dedicated to making and marketing medications for animals.

He started the operation in his basement after selling the family drugstore in Bay View to the Osco chain in 1995.

Since then, some unusual clients have helped the business grow and prosper.

Take Rudolph, who lives on a farm called Reindeer Games in the Town of Erin.

Langer got involved with the case last summer through Lynn Peterson, a vet with Kettle Hills Veterinary Service in Hartford who diagnosed the exotic fungus. Although Peterson typically dispenses drugs from the truck he uses to make calls, in the case of Rudolph, an uncommon drug was needed, so he contacted Langer.

The remedy worked, and now Rudolph is ready for jobs come Christmastime, said Cindy Phillips who owns Reindeer Games with her husband, Jeff.

The Pet Apothecary suite has a main compounding area where Langer and his cousin and assistant, Joel Forbes, use mortars and pestles to pulverize chemicals into pet medications.

The Pet Apothecary



Photo/Michael Sears

During mosquito season, the fish that Heather Neldner feeds to the Humboldt penguins at the Milwaukee County Zoo might contain medicine to fend off malaria. Pharmacist Jeff Langer provides medicines in various forms to help animals avoid diseases.



Photo/Jack Orton

Jeff Langer (right) and the staff at the Pet Apothecary, including his wife, Patti (rear), find creative ways to make sure animals take their medicine.

Arts
TV & Radio
Books
Calendars
More ...

FEATURES

Lifestyle
Advice Columns
Homes
 > Real Estate
 > Entree
Food/Cooking
Personal Technology
Health/Science
Religion
Cars
Travel
Visitors' Guide

NEED HELP?

Searching Articles
Placing an Ad
Setting Your Home Page
Newspaper Subscriptions
Jobs @ MJS
About the Journal Sentinel
Internships
Submit News Tips
Contact Us

FAQ

Questions about accessing stories? See our Frequently Asked Questions page.

PARTNER SITES

MKEonline.com
MetroParent
TODAY'S TMJ4
620 WTMJ
94.5 WKTI
CNI Newspapers
Lake Country

They also package the drugs in helpful and creative ways.

"Last week, for the first time, I did have to provide an inhaler for a cat," Langer said.

While it might be hard to visualize that, other solutions are easier to imagine.

Sometimes, for example, they make medications into a gel that can be absorbed through an animal's ear.

For the Milwaukee County Zoo, Langer provides pills to help the Humboldt penguins fend off malaria during mosquito season. The pills are put inside the fish fed to the flock, and the birds are happy to take them that way, said Roberta Wallace, senior staff veterinarian.

Langer also will flavor medications with meat or fruit essences to make them more palatable to other zoo animals, she added.

Loading liquid medications into syringes so they can be squirted down the mouth of a reluctant animal also is a common trick.

That was a great help to Leslie Elger, a 64-year-old pet sitter who lives in the Town of Jackson and has been a client for years.

Her problem was with Mr. B, a large tabby cat that needed ongoing medication but bit the fingers of those trying to give him pills.

Mr. B died at 16 in November, but "without Jeff's help, I think I would have had to let him go earlier," Elger said. "I knew he needed his meds, but I needed my finger, too."

The idea of becoming a pet pharmacist had long appealed to Langer, back to the days when he studied the needs of some animals while at the School of Pharmacy at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He gave that up because it required too much work in the lab and not enough work with people.

But even as he settled into the family pharmacy business in Milwaukee, the idea of ministering to animals never left him.

While most people get pills for their dogs and cats at the vet's office, pharmacists in Wisconsin are licensed to fill such prescriptions. Over the years, vets would sometimes seek Langer's help in converting human drugs for use on sick animals.

"We are allowed to dip into the human medications," explained Mark Thomas, a veterinarian who owns the Community Veterinary Clinic in Bay View, near Langer's old store. "But unfortunately, they don't come in a size that is readily available for us."

It is not practical to tell a pet owner to give Fido one-tenth of a pill, so Thomas occasionally asked Langer to reformulate medications.

Animal calling

As the pharmacy business changed and Langer decided he needed to sell his store to a chain, the idea of serving animals remained. As part of the sale to Osco, Langer agreed to stay on for a while to staff his old store. But he also insisted on an unusual clause allowing him to immediately operate a non-human pharmacy.

Langer then got an animal-only pharmacy license and opened the Pet Apothecary, while still working for Osco full time.

He built the business through word of mouth, relying on contacts made with vets over the years, including one who is the uncle of his wife, Patti. She, too, is a pharmacist, and as the Pet Apothecary grew, the couple worked together in their basement, filling orders by mail to keep the overhead low.

The business grew, and eventually Langer cut back on his hours at Osco. Then a year ago he decided to rent about 1,000 square feet in a Bayside office building.

Altogether, the Langers have about \$100,000 invested in the business, which Langer said has always been profitable. Sales are growing 10% to 15% a year but have not yet reached \$1 million.

Internet approach

Although about 90% of its sales are in Wisconsin, the Pet Apothecary has a Web site, www.petapothecary.com, and competes with several similar online services.

One of the larger ones is the Doctors Foster & Smith Pharmacy in Rhinelander, part of a mail order organization that carries a wide range of pet supplies.

Foster & Smith employs three full-time pharmacists who fill about 70,000 prescriptions a year nationwide, according to Chris Larson, the pharmacy manager and chief compounding pharmacist.

He's heard about Langer's much smaller operation.

"From what I know about them, they sound like they are a really nice organization," he said. "If they are servicing their local community, more power to them. I would like to see them succeed and prosper."

Langer has cut back his work at Osco to about one shift a week at a nearby outlet in the RiverPoint Village Shopping Center. He can spare the time and enjoys talking to people.

But if that becomes too burdensome, Langer has a plan to keep in contact with human clients.

The restrictions in his sale contract have expired, so "if I had to leave Osco, I would probably open a Pet Apothecary, human division," he said.

From the Mar. 13, 2006 editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
Have an opinion on this story? [Write a letter to the editor](#) or start an [online forum](#).

Subscribe today and receive 4 weeks free! [Sign up now](#).

[BACK TO TOP](#)

[News](#) | [Business](#) | [Sports](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Wheels](#) | [Homes](#) | [Rentals](#)

[RSS](#) [XML/RSS News Feeds](#) ([What's this?](#)) | [JSO Wireless](#)

© 2005, Journal Sentinel Inc. All rights reserved. | Produced by [Journal Interactive](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

Journal Sentinel Inc. is a subsidiary of [Journal Communications](#).