

## Paying It Forward

Christine Bardwell knows a thing or two about paying it forward.

The Town of Tonawanda resident, who takes her dog Toby to Northtown Animal Hospital, was given \$1,500 last fall to use from the Pet Emergency Fund to help pay for surgery and treatments for heartworm. Bardwell paid \$1,300 back, though under no obligation to do so, because she wanted the money available for others in need.

“When dogs need veterinary help, sometimes people don’t know what they’re getting into, and it can be heartbreaking not to be able to afford the treatment,” Bardwell said. “I felt bad about accepting the money because I felt there was someone else who would need it more.”

Toby, a terrier or schnauzer mix, is a young dog who came into Bardwell’s life in September 2020 from a local rescue. He is generally fearful of people, especially men, leading Bardwell to assume he was mistreated at an early age. But Toby’s very affectionate with her. “He’s the best,” she said.



Toby was in poor health when she got him. She took the dog to Northtown Animal Hospital, and he was diagnosed with heartworm, tapeworm and roundworm. “The vet told me if I hadn’t brought him in in the next few days he would have died,” Bardwell said. The rescue organization said they’d take Toby back, but otherwise wouldn’t help pay the veterinary cost or refund the fees they charged. Bardwell went ahead with the treatments anyway.

But Bardwell is a senior citizen on a fixed income who lives with two dogs. She had also already spent a considerable sum on her previous dog’s health. The retired social work examiner worried how she was going to pay for Toby. “I don’t have that much money to throw around, but I didn’t think about the money. I just thought about making him better,” she said. The staff and doctors at the animal hospital were supportive. “When I was told about the help from the Pet Emergency Fund, I thought they were kidding. I was very grateful. It’s not that I didn’t want help, but I thought maybe someone needs it more than me.”

Because Toby’s condition was so advanced, he was referred to Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine for an operation. “I was scared to death to go – I don’t even leave the house!” Bardwell said of the drive to Ithaca. Pinchers were used on a carotid artery in Toby’s heart to extract 16 12-inch-long heartworms. Toby was prescribed heart medicine and given Viagra to dilate blood vessels allowing the heartworms to pass through. The dog was later treated for worms in his arteries.

Recovering at their Tonawanda home, Toby needed to be still for the next six months out of concern activity could provoke an aneurysm. Bardwell watched with delight when Toby was able to be active once more. “He was zooming around the yard like a maniac, throwing a chew toy up in the air and swinging it around,” she said. An echo cardiogram in June found Toby’s heart muscle shrank back to its normal size, and a visit to Northtown Animal Hospital in August gave him a clean bill of health.

“He’s as good as he can be, and I’m thrilled,” Bardwell said. “I couldn’t have done it without the Pet Emergency Fund. I didn’t know what it was all about, but I do now. The generous contribution helped save his life.”

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