

“The SBTDC opened our eyes to the possibilities”

Planning for the future

Veterinary Specialty Hospital

Cary, NC

Counseled by

one of two SBTDC offices in Raleigh and Chapel Hill

Sponsored by

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Veterinary Specialty Hospital gives pets a second chance at life. “Until we opened in 1997, there were few viable options in the state other than NC State’s vet school for animals needing advanced surgery or those with cancer,” says managing partner Kevin Concannon, DVM. Kevin, partners Gary Spodnick and Jerry Waddle; ten staff veterinarians; and 57 employees provide surgery, anesthesia, internal medicine, oncology, dentistry and other services for 10,000 pets yearly. Their clients are both pet owners and the 3,147 veterinarians now licensed in North Carolina who refer pets for specialty services.

“There’s only a handful of similar practices around the nation,” adds Kevin, “and we have unusual medical and management issues.” “Vet schools provide us with a basic working knowledge of general practice management models,” says Kevin, “but that was not enough to run our practice successfully.”

Kevin first came to the SBTDC in 2000 as a participant in the inaugural SBTDC-sponsored “NxLevel for Veterinarians” course. NxLevel is designed to teach entrepreneurs the skills needed to create, develop, and strengthen successful business ventures. The SBTDC partnered with North Carolina State University’s College of Veterinary Medicine to offer NxLevel to their graduates practicing in North Carolina.

“NxLevel gave us the specific training we needed, and it introduced us to important local resources like bankers, accountants, other practice managers, and most importantly, to the SBTDC,” Kevin says. “We were able to build important relationships.”

Veterinary Specialty Hospital’s work with the SBTDC continued with Raleigh-based counselor Mark McKnight. “Kevin and I talk monthly,” says Mark, “and since he and Pam Stevenson, the practice manager, took NxLevel, we’ve worked together on financial analyses, on legal issues affecting their operations, evaluating their overall annual needs and goals, and on market analysis.” “Mark is a great sounding board as well as a tremendous source of information,” adds Kevin. “Working with him and other SBTDC counselors has increased our level of confidence in making important decisions.”

Veterinary Specialty Hospital also used the SBTDC-designed Target Market Analysis to determine regional competition, to gather statistics on their potential market, and to identify potential referring veterinary practices. “Your Target Market Analysis gave us hard data on which to base our marketing efforts,” notes Kevin, “so we are now more focused and can spend less time and money reaching the people we need to reach.”

In December of 2002, Veterinary Specialty Hospital staff participated in a two-day



interpersonal communications and group dynamics retreat conducted by Mark McKnight, SBTDC regional director Mike Seibert, and the SBTDC management education services (MES) staff (see article on page 11). “Since we run three shifts a day, seven days a week, there’s not a lot of opportunity for all our staff to develop a sense of community and organizational fit,” observes Kevin. Staff members completed The Attentional and Interpersonal Styles (TAIS) questionnaire before the event. Results showing interpersonal traits and detailing how each Veterinary Specialty Hospital participant interacted (or preferred to interact) with others formed the basis of this retreat. “Our staff changed for the better after this experience,” says Kevin, “but we also realize that our efforts to unify staff must be ongoing.”

“The SBTDC counselors we’ve worked with quickly established our trust, and they offered an outsiders’ viewpoint to help us evaluate our practice,” Kevin observes. “I see now that we really had a minimal level of business knowledge, but the SBTDC opened our eyes to the possibilities.”

