

Smiling Blue Skies

Taking a bite out of cancer since 2001



CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF SMILING BLUE SKIES

**UNIVERSITY
of GUELPH**

OVC Pet Trust

2021

Celebrating 20 Years Together.



In photos: Dean Wichtel and Sturgis, Suzi Beber and Tom Wright's Golden Retriever (left). Kim Robinson and Suzi Beber with Jesse Jane at The Smiling Blue Skies Woof-Fit Tofino in 2016 (right).

OVC Pet Trust was founded in 1986 by a group of dedicated volunteers to support the work of veterinary specialists and researchers at the University of Guelph's Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) who were committed to advancing the health and well-being of our companion animals. Over the past 35 years, OVC Pet Trust has established long-standing partnerships and friendships that have fuelled our shared mission of working to improve life for our beloved pets. One of these remarkable and noteworthy partnerships is with Suzi Beber and The Smiling Blue Skies Cancer Fund.

Improving the lives of animals is what we do here at OVC. Our medical innovations lead to longer, healthier and happier lives for the companions who give us so much comfort, joy and love. Many of our resources and tools to treat and study companion animal cancer have been made possible by the continued support of The Smiling Blue Skies Cancer Fund, thanks to Suzi Beber and her community of devoted Smiling Blue Skies supporters.

Thank you Suzi for your dedication, your passion and your commitment to making the world a better place for people and their pets. The Ontario Veterinary College is extremely fortunate to benefit from 20 years of your steadfast fundraising efforts and loyal generosity.

Dr. Jeff Wichtel
Dean and Professor
Ontario Veterinary College
University of Guelph

Dear Smiling Blue Skies Community:

2021 marks 20 years of The Smiling Blue Skies Cancer Fund. Since 2001, OVC Pet Trust has been incredibly privileged to benefit from Suzi Beber's generosity. Smiling Blue Skies began with a \$1,000 donation in memory of Suzi's beloved Golden Retriever, Blues. Today, The Smiling Blue Skies Cancer Fund has grown to become an important and vital support in the fight to improve life for pets with cancer at the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) and beyond.

In honour of 20 years of Smiling Blue Skies, we created this Special Anniversary Report. Because of your generosity, OVC Pet Trust has been able to fund oncology research projects and initiatives at OVC to advance the prevention and treatment of cancer in dogs and other companion animals. Smiling Blue Skies has also helped us provide crucial equipment, clinical staff and valuable resources to operate OVC's Animal Cancer Centre.

Over the past 20 years Suzi and Smiling Blue Skies volunteers and community members have put in countless hours of work on hundreds of events, fundraisers and initiatives all in the name of one cause: to impact cancer care for the better for our beloved animals.

As many of our supporters are well aware, impact extends far beyond the walls of OVC in Guelph, Ontario. Our researchers are looking for answers to cancer that may help animals across Canada and even around the world. Their work has implications for human oncology research as well.

In May of this year, The Smiling Blue Skies Cancer Fund reached an incredible fundraising milestone: more than \$2 million has now been raised to improve companion animal health and well-being



in the field of veterinary cancer care and discovery, and we couldn't have done it without your support.

I'd like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Suzi and the entire Smiling Blue Skies community for everything you have done over the past 20 years to help animals and the people who love them. The hope, the comfort and the inspiration you have provided to pet owners and animal lovers alike has made such a difference. Thank you for sharing in our drive to help the pets we love, live longer, healthier lives. We will be forever grateful.

Kim Robinson
Director, OVC Pet Trust
Ontario Veterinary College
University of Guelph

The Inspiration Behind Smiling Blue Skies



In photo: Suzi and Blues.

“Blues was treated very well at OVC...In our time there I saw what was beginning to happen, what could be the future for other pets with cancer, and I thought I could help.”

Suzi Beber
Founder, Smiling Blue Skies Cancer Fund

The start of a movement

When Suzi Beber’s beloved Golden Retriever Blues was diagnosed with lymphoma in 2000, she brought him to the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) for treatment. Blues participated in two oncology studies before passing away at the young age of six.

“Blues was treated very well at OVC, and I think his veterinarians learned a lot from him,” Beber says. “In our time there I saw what was beginning to happen, what could be the future for other pets with cancer, and I thought I could help.”

Beber made a \$1,000 donation to OVC Pet Trust in memory of Blues. That gift started what would become the Smiling Blue Skies Cancer Fund and the Smiling Blue Skies Fund for Innovative Research.

Dr. Elizabeth Stone, who was Dean of OVC from 2005 to 2015 during the early days of Smiling Blue Skies, says it was common for clients who had pets treated at OVC to make a donation in memory of their pet. Some, like Suzi, even made it a goal to host a fundraising event and donate the proceeds to OVC Pet Trust.

“Most of the time, someone who started off the way Suzi did would do it for a while, but we expected they would move on to other things in time,” Stone says. “Suzi didn’t move on and it was remarkable. She created a whole movement.”

If you build it, they will come

When Blues was receiving treatment at OVC, chemotherapy in pets was less common than it is

today. Clinicians and technicians were providing treatment in just one small room in OVC’s small animal clinic. There was room to expand.

“We were getting demand for chemotherapy at the time, but we didn’t have the space yet,” says Dr. Paul Woods, founding co-director of the University of Guelph’s Institute for Comparison Cancer Investigation (ICCI). “It was clear we were ready for a new cancer centre — that if we could build it, the demand, the need, was there.”

By 2008 Woods, and his colleague Dr. Brenda Coomber would lead the ICCI, an institute that was the first of its kind in Canada, combining the expertise of researchers in basic cancer biology and clinical specialists in veterinary medicine to take an integrated approach to cancer studies. A key component of the ICCI was the establishment of a 16,000-square foot building that provided the space, equipment and people to make an impact – a world class animal cancer centre within the OVC Health Sciences Centre – dedicated to cancer diagnosis, treatment, teaching and clinical research.

“Our goal was to enhance the profile of cancer research on campus, across researchers who were looking at canine cancer and those looking at other types,” says Coomber. “We were able to buy basic equipment and hire a person for a few years, and we felt we were gaining traction if we could only find a way to keep going.”

That’s when Coomber learned of Suzi Beber, a keen and dedicated donor who wanted to ensure veterinarians knew as much about diagnosing, treating and curing cancer in pets as possible.

Seed money for “what ifs”

Coomber notes one benefit of working across disciplines on cancer research is the “outrageous ideas” that researchers sometimes generate together. She says getting started on a novel concept can be a major challenge from a funding perspective because agencies often require evidence that an investigator is on the right track.

“Sometimes what we really need is a small pilot study to help us rule in or rule out some of those ideas,” says Coomber. “Suzi understood that, and she was involved in bringing that idea forward.”

That idea became the Smiling Blue Skies Fund for Innovative Cancer Research, which fills a gap at OVC, and enhances OVC’s Mona Campbell Centre for Animal Cancer’s ability to support creative cancer research at its most fragile and vulnerable stage.

Creative problem solving

“We’ve had some degree of influence in a lot of areas because we step outside of the box,” says Beber. “Where somebody else might say, ‘I need to see more information to make a decision about whether I’m going to fund this,’ we provide seed money because we want them to get the best start.”

The Smiling Blue Skies Cancer Fund continues to provide support in thoughtful and meaningful ways. In addition to two critical staff roles at the ICCI, Smiling Blue Skies has supported important projects that would have had no other source of funding.

“Suzi took a leap of faith and trusted our vision,” says Coomber. “Thanks to her trust and the support from the entire Smiling Blue Skies community, we have been able to do so much.”

20 years and counting

In recognition of her efforts, Beber has received numerous awards, including a Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal from the Governor-General and an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Guelph.

“Suzi started Smiling Blue Skies and it just kept expanding,” says Stone. “This fund was initiated by a private citizen based on her interactions with the hospital. In many ways, we needed to keep out of her way so she could keep going. What she accomplished is not something one school would be able to do on its own.”

Turning Grief into Hope: A Community Story



In photo: Suzi with Leanne Tucker and Leanne's dogs Puzzle, Cedar and Scrabble.

“Every dollar raised is because of the tears we’ve shed for the dogs we’ve lost — it’s so hard when you lose them...Suzi has been a wonderful advocate for so many people. We have a lot of loyalty to her for that.”

Mary Shillabeer
Organizer of the Smiling Blue Skies Calgary Walk for Canine Cancer

Suzi Beber's life changed forever when, at the age of 38, she suffered severe complications following a routine hospital procedure. She faced a lengthy recovery involving daily physiological and neurological assessments. She had to learn to walk again, and to navigate new physical, emotional and cognitive challenges.

During her recovery process, an extraordinary Golden Retriever puppy joined her new life. The puppy's registered name was "TeachersPet Smiling Blue Skies. (Can CH Teacherspet Smiling Blue Skies CGC)." His call name was Blues.

"Blues was a beautiful dog with a great smile," Beber says. "He was never a certified service dog, but he was in service to me, and he had a tail wag and a smile for everyone."

For Suzi, Blues was also a healer. He helped her rebuild her life, and reenter the world that was different from the one she had left behind. Blues was a critical part of Beber's recovery, and her happiness. Then, in 2000, Blues was diagnosed with cancer. He died the next year, at the young age of six.

"When your dog dies, it is devastating. Learning to lose is the hardest lesson of all, a lesson that we never completely learn to master," Beber says. "Instead, we learn to live with our loss. In doing the work I do, I have found a positive way to live with my own grief."

Building a community

Suzi developed knowledge about various areas of pet health, and soon she began to consult with pet owners and their dogs. It's that knowledge — and her willingness to be available to support pet owners who are dealing

with grief after a loss — that has made Suzi such a respected and valuable resource for dog owners across North America.

Mary Shillabeer — organizer of the Smiling Blue Skies Calgary Walk for Canine Cancer — says she first connected with Suzi at an event through a dog club. On the same day, one of Mary's own dogs was diagnosed with hemangiosarcoma, an aggressive cancer that affects blood vessels.

"Suzi's not a veterinarian but she has a lot of knowledge, and she can help wade through what it all means to help a person understand their options," says Shillabeer. "Suzi has been a wonderful advocate for so many people. We have a lot of loyalty to her for that."

In 2010, the Smiling Blue Skies Walk for Canine Cancer needed a new organizer for the Calgary event, and Shillabeer says it was out of friendship with Suzi that she and co-organizer Leanne Tucker took on the role. The walk — which usually attracts no more than a few dozen participants — has raised a whopping \$306,000 in 11 years, including \$38,000 in 2021, when the event went virtual because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Every dollar raised is because of the tears we've shed for the dogs we've lost — it's so hard when you lose them," says Shillabeer. "I'm gobsmacked by the amount of money we can raise and I know they'll never find a cure for cancer if we don't support those who are looking. It all comes down to hope."

Better lives for pets

Dr. Doreen Houston, Chair of the OVC Pet Trust Advisory Board, says it all fits with OVC Pet Trust's mission to help pets live

longer, healthier, happier lives.

When Houston graduated from the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) in 1980, diseases in pets such as malignant melanoma were not survivable. But in 2011, when her own dog Rayner was diagnosed, an aggressive treatment plan — including a partial jaw amputation and a melanoma vaccine — saved Rayner's life. Rayner survived another three years after diagnosis, and died from another cause in her 15th year.

Houston and Rayner participated in their first Smiling Blue Skies walks in Toronto and then in Guelph together. In 2021 Houston participated in the virtual walk based in Calgary, meeting supporters there for the first time.

"Pet lovers are pet lovers, no matter where you live, and the Smiling Blue Skies supporters are lovely, dedicated and passionate about truly making a difference," says Houston. "By donating this volume of money, Smiling Blue Skies has been able to fund research projects and equipment relating to cancer. I cringe to think what might not have been possible without Suzi and the Smiling Blue Skies community."

Houston says it is a testament to the connections Suzi has made, and her advocacy that so much has been accomplished in canine cancer research.

"Suzi has been a positive voice for OVC and OVC Pet Trust, and inspired so many of us to find a way to honour the dogs that have meant so much to us in our own lives," says Houston. "Suzi took something that was so devastating, and she converted it into something that has made a significant difference in the lives of many people and pets."

How to raise \$2 million (and counting)

Sometimes it's the smallest actions that have the biggest impact.

"We just need to creatively think about ways we can help that may not be the way someone else would help," says Beber.

It started when a connection in Huntsville, Ontario asked about setting up a Smiling Blue Skies Walk for Canine Cancer. Then similar events cropped up in communities across Canada. Dog clubs began raising money, and, then so did children who wanted to make a difference through Smiling Blue Skies. Then there were candles and magnets and fashion shows and calendars and art and jewelry and cookbooks.

"I always thought Smiling Blue Skies should be about everybody, whether you give \$2 or \$10 or \$100, it's all significant," says Suzi. "We don't have big companies giving money. Smiling Blues Skies is made up of families and individuals and kids with lemonade stands."

Under Suzi's leadership, Smiling Blue Skies raised funds for a suite of mobile lighting equipment for operating rooms at OVC, a quiet room in OVC's Mona Campbell Centre for Animal Cancer for clients to use when dealing with hard decisions and two staff positions focused on cancer clinical trials in OVC's Companion Animal Hospital. Smiling Blue Skies has funded numerous studies, including the first hemangiosarcoma validation study involving 52 golden retrievers from the Greater Toronto Area.

"Smiling Blue Skies is different from other funds," says Suzi. "It's not a lump sum to be used for one project — it's for so many different things. It goes where it's needed — that's the spirit of it. It's big and little ideas, and every single cent goes to OVC's quest to find more and better ways to understand and deal with the complex and devastating disease of cancer in our companion animals."



How Smiling Blue Skies Improves Research

In photos: Tofino Woof-fit, 2016 (left), The 5th Annual Smiling Blue Skies Toronto Walk for Canine Cancer 2016 (right).

“Most people who want to work at an academic cancer centre want to do research in addition to treating animals. To attract the best people, we need to show there are mechanisms to fund and support their research. We have been able to do that, thanks to OVC Pet Trust and Smiling Blue Skies.”

Dr. Jeff Wichtel
Dean, Ontario Veterinary College

Many types of cancer are naturally-occurring in dogs and cats as well as people. In recent years, researchers have built considerable momentum through comparative oncology by analyzing how some cancers and treatments behave across species. The findings have the potential to offer massive benefits to veterinary and human medicine alike, through opportunities for further clinical research.

Two key features that make the Institute for Comparative Cancer Investigation (ICCI) so successful — the tumour bank and clinical trials coordination — are managed by staff members that are supported by funds donated to Smiling Blue Skies.

“By funding both of these roles, Smiling Blue Skies has been an incredible supporter of clinical research and especially clinical trials in various areas of canine and feline oncology,” says Dr. Brenda Coomber, founding co-director of ICCI. “This support has really allowed us to push things forward, to innovate and push boundaries to improve cancer care – in pets, and maybe even in people too.”

Attracting the best

Dr. Jeff Wichtel, Dean of the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC), says projects and staff funded by Smiling Blue Skies are key features that attract world class cancer researchers to the College. The funding has given rise to cutting-edge techniques such as immunotherapy vaccines and new measurement tools for molecules such as microRNA that may help provide early detection of some cancers, or better predict how a pet will react to treatment options.

“Most people who want to work at an academic cancer centre want to do research in addition to treating animals,” says Wichtel. “To attract the best people,

we need to show there are mechanisms to fund and support their research. We have been able to do that, thanks to OVC Pet Trust and Smiling Blue Skies.”

Dr. Geoff Wood, co-director of ICCI, studied tumour biology at the University of Toronto after graduating with a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) degree from OVC. He says it was the opportunity to compare cancers in animals and humans that drew him back to Guelph.

“One of the main attractions for me at the time was OVC’s Mona Campbell Centre for Animal Cancer,” Wood says. “On the human side, there is a very different process for sample acquisition, and the idea of the tumour bank was a big part of the reason I decided to come to Guelph.”

Wood’s team has done several studies across species to identify the differences and commonalities in tumours. He notes hemangiosarcomas — an aggressive cancer that affects blood vessels — are common in dogs and cats but relatively rare in people. His lab has been doing sequencing to compare hemangiosarcomas in animals to

their human counterparts.

In one study, he was able to source all animal tumours he required from the ICCI’s tumour bank, while the human samples were sourced from six different sites.

Understanding cancer behaviour

Dr. Tony Mutsaers, veterinary medical oncologist at OVC, says the tumour bank is also an excellent resource for graduate students, who use samples to produce small clinical trials as part of their program. Students can access more than 8000 samples of blood or tissue from approximately 90 types of cancer. Those smaller studies have the potential to contribute at a larger level.

“Even in the most prevalent cancers, we’re learning a lot about the biology,” says Mutsaers. “We have cloned the genome in the dog, we’re coming up with a pile of markers for disease, and there is a large amount of investigational work that is going on in structured clinical trials.”

With that knowledge, Mutsaers notes researchers are closer to understanding how an individual pet’s cancer behaves and predicting how the cancer might respond to treatment. That’s thanks, largely to another notable change over the last decade: the growing number of researchers – and type of expertise – represented at OVC.

“What is unique about OVC is that we have researchers in clinical and non-clinical departments that are approaching cancers from a variety of different research perspectives,” says Mutsaers. “Here, we are able to come together, collaborate and share our findings to collectively learn and advance research in cancer.”

International credibility

OVC’s interdisciplinary approach and ongoing support from Smiling Blue Skies builds opportunities. The College was the first Canadian veterinary member of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Comparative Oncology Clinical Trials Consortium, which links industry, government, and academia for the purpose of veterinary oncology clinical trials.

“Thanks to Smiling Blue Skies and OVC Pet Trust we have infrastructure and expertise in place to not only evaluate potential solutions, at OVC, but to bring in these larger consortiums to produce a clinical trial that will be large enough to know for sure if something has an impact or not,” says Mutsaers.

Always innovating

“It’s incredibly challenging to get research funds for veterinary clinical trials, but these trials need to be done,” says Dr. Michelle Oblak, co-director of ICCI. “A lot of impacts we’ve made wouldn’t have been possible without them.”



How Smiling Blue Skies Improves Research continued.

She says funding and past research success has allowed OVC clinicians to provide a better level of care, and given them confidence to tackle bigger problems in more innovative ways. In 2018 Oblak marked a veterinary first by using a 3-D printed custom titanium plate for surgery on a dog's skull.

"Most of my work is funded by OVC Pet Trust, and the impacts I've been able to have as a faculty member in my career has been a direct result of the support we have received," Oblak says.

A role for clinical trials

"We are first and foremost a medical hospital that treats patients, and our clients appreciate the high level of care animals receive here," says Dr. Vicky Sabine, clinical research coordinator in OVC's Health Sciences Centre. "But a lot of clients are also happy for the opportunity to pay back, to help research and increase opportunities for future patients."

In photos: Cancer Patients, Lacey (top) and Bella (right).

Sabine works with clinicians to identify clients who might be a match for studies that are recruiting patients. She explains what each study entails and coordinates any extra visits or samples the study requires.

"I like being the interface between the clinic and the research, because I get to explain the research to clients," Sabine says, who has her PhD in veterinary science. "While I have a research background I'm also a dog person at heart, and I get to cuddle the dog while I'm talking and build a personal connection while I explain the research and develop rapport and trust with clients."

Sabine's position has been funded by Smiling Blue Skies since 2014, and her role supports all oncology-related clinical trials throughout OVC's Companion Animal Hospital. She says because she is a staff member working across all projects, she has been able to perform additional duties, including supporting the tumour bank when needed, and supervising 38 work-term students over the past seven years who get unique opportunities to learn about research.

The Ontario Veterinary College is currently conducting more than 24 companion animal-related clinical trials in specialty care areas such as oncology, nutrition, emergency care, advanced surgical techniques and more. Each study aims to help advance medical treatments that can improve the health or quality of life for our pets.

What is a clinical trial?

Clinical trials are research studies used in all specialties of human and veterinary medicine to evaluate new medical devices, vaccines, diagnostic tests and treatments. These trials may investigate new types of surgical or other procedures as well as novel medical therapies for patients.

What are the benefits of participating in a clinical trial?

Clinical trials allow clinicians to discover new and improved ways to prevent, diagnose or treat patients. By participating in a clinical trial, your pet may benefit by: gaining access to new treatments that are not yet available to the public; obtaining expert medical care at a leading health care facility; playing an active role in developing a specialized healthcare plan; and helping others by contributing to medical research.

How can my pet take part in a clinical trial at OVC?

Pet owners should talk to their family veterinarian about clinical trial treatment and referral options to OVC. To see the full list of current clinical trials please visit the OVC Health Sciences Centre website:

uoguel.ph/ovcclinicaltrials





What Does Impact Look Like?

In photo: Suzi Beber and Tom Wright's Golden Retriever BB King.

“It can be discouraging at times, because as clinicians who deal with cancer, we give a lot of bad news, but knowing there are people [like Suzi] who care so passionately about the quality of care we provide is incredible.”

Dr. Michelle Oblak
Associate Professor and Co-Director ICCI
Surgical Oncologist,
Ontario Veterinary College

In 2000 when Suzi Beber's beloved Golden Retriever Blues was ill, Beber was still explaining to people she met that indeed, pets could also get cancer. At the time, the condition was not as well known or understood, and there were fewer options for treatment.

Today, we know one in four dogs will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime. But cancer is not an immediate death sentence, and that's something Beber has had a large role in helping people understand, says Dr. Elizabeth Stone, former dean of the Ontario Veterinary College at the University of Guelph.

“Suzi has dedicated a great deal of time to educate countless pet owners that cancer can be severe, but it can also be treated,” says Stone.

Better diagnosis

Dr. Michelle Oblak, veterinary surgical oncologist and current co-director of the University of Guelph's Institute for Comparative Cancer Investigation (ICCI), says clinicians are learning more all the time about how to treat patients in a way that is safe and effective.

“Every week that I'm in the clinic I get someone coming in, saying ‘we were told there was nothing else that could be done but we didn't want to believe it,’” says Oblak. “Often it turns out there is something we can do to help improve life for an animal.”

Twenty years ago, clinicians made diagnostic decisions based on radiographs, or X-rays, an important but nonspecific screening test. Now they use the same advanced diagnostic imaging tools available in human medicine, such as MRI, CT and ultrasound. They also have access to minimally invasive surgeries that can improve the way veterinarians approach pets with cancer when a surgical option is required.

“It can be discouraging at times, because as clinicians who deal with cancer, we give a lot of bad news,” says Oblak. “But knowing there are people who care so passionately about the quality of care we provide is incredible.”

Specializations are developing

When a pet is diagnosed with cancer, often there is no right or wrong decision. Dr. Paul Woods, founding co-director of ICCI, says some families are interested in higher risk than others, but ultimately they need to feel comfortable with their choice. For families who choose to pursue cancer treatment for their pets, they have access to “the big three” at OVC— a medical oncologist, a surgical oncologist and radiation oncologist.

“As a research intensive institution, we also conduct clinical trials in a number of cancer areas giving clients and patients access to additional therapeutic tools, such as immunotherapy,” says Woods. “This adds a fourth pillar of care and support for patients and may eventually help us find answers to cancer in both animals and in humans.”

He notes when cancer is treated, patients often do well, and enter remission but cancers may eventually return. Treatment offers families more quality time with their pet. Increasingly, researchers are improving the high standard of care that all patients receive, and sometimes adding new therapies that may help them do much better for longer.

What treatment looks like

For new patients who are referred to OVC for the first time, the idea of cancer treatment for their pet can seem daunting. Woods says it's natural to be nervous, to wonder what they might expect.

“When new patients have an opportunity to come to our front office, they might see dogs running up and down the halls,” says Woods. “When they realize these dogs are outpatients, that they're here for chemotherapy, and they're playing, they see it's possible for a dog with a cancer diagnosis to no longer be in pain, to be eating, and to have a really good quality of life — that's what we strive for.”

What's in a tumour bank?

OVC's tumour bank — a repository of tumours and blood samples that have been preserved and catalogued for future use — is the first of its kind in Canada. The tumour bank was integral to the early plans for the Institute for Comparative Cancer Investigation (ICCI), and funding a full-time staff member to manage the tumour bank was one of Smiling Blue Skies' earliest commitments, in 2012.

“The tumour bank doesn't really help today's patients, and it doesn't generate revenue, but it represents a significant value to researchers and our graduate students who specialize in oncology or other areas,” says Dr. Geoff Woods, co-director of the ICCI.

He says if a graduate student is interested in studying a specific cancer such as lymphoma or osteosarcoma, they may not have the time or volume of patients within the three-year timeframe of their residency to source specific samples. That's where the tumour bank comes in.

The tumour bank contains more than 8,000 samples that are used for many kinds of studies. Having such a long-term collection of information can help test new technologies too, says Michele Oblak, current co-director of ICCI.

“Having that information available helps us to evaluate so many things with respect to how cancer has progressed over time, and the impact of treatments over time, says Oblak. “Knowing we are always building this information is very encouraging to clients because they understand it leads to more opportunities to provide care that is safe and efficacious for their pets.”

MAKING MILESTONES



Suzi Beber makes a \$1,000 donation to OVC Pet Trust in memory of her Golden Retriever, Blues. This was the founding gift for what would become the Smiling Blue Skies Cancer Fund & Smiling Blue Skies Fund for Innovative Research. Suzi begins to offer 24-hour support to dog owners dealing with a cancer diagnosis, preparing for, and grieving the loss of a pet.

2001

2003 The first Smiling Blue Skies Walk for Canine Cancer is held on Sunday August 10, 2003, at Lions Club Park in Port Carling, ON.



2008

Smiling Blue Skies for Cancer Walks goes coast-to-coast. Seven walks to end canine cancer are held across 5 provinces in Canada: Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Alberta & British Columbia.

2011

The inaugural Walk in the Park, OVC Pet Trust gala is held in Toronto, ON and honours Suzi Beber for her support of animal cancer research and care. Donations from the event go toward the expansion of companion animal cancer care and the building of the animal cancer centre at OVC.



2010 National Agility Championships raises \$10,000 to support the Smiling Blue Skies Cancer fund. Funds raised supplied a suite of mobile lighting for the cancer centre at the Ontario Veterinary College.

2012

Smiling Blue Skies funds a quiet room within OVC's animal centre. This special room provides families with a quiet environment while making difficult medical decisions for their pets. This same year, funding for the Tumour Bank Coordinator begins.



2013

Suzi Beber is honoured with a Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal issued by the Governor General of Canada.

2014

To expand possibilities in future cancer research, Smiling Blue Skies begins funding the OVC Clinical Trials Coordinator position, a role aimed to educate and support pet owners whose pets are participating in trials at OVC.



2021

Together with Suzi Beber and the Ontario Veterinary College, the community of Smiling Blue Skies supporters and volunteers celebrate the incredible milestone of raising \$2 million for canine cancer!

2015

The tumour bank at the OVC cancer centre reaches a milestone and accumulates cancer samples from more than 500 cases (dogs and cats).

2016

In recognition of her work to support and advance canine cancer research, Suzi Beber is awarded a Doctor of Laws (honoris causa) from the University of Guelph. At the celebration of her honorary doctorate Suzi visits the animal cancer center for the first time to witness the impact of her efforts.

2018

Clinical Trials efforts to support cancer research reaches a milestone with 1,090 companion animal patients recruited into 35 oncology-related studies at OVC.



Together with Suzi Beber and the Ontario Veterinary College, the community of Smiling Blue Skies supporters and volunteers celebrate the incredible milestone of raising \$2 million for canine cancer!

Congratulations to Suzi Beber and the entire Smiling Blue Skies community: your generosity is helping to drive research and discovery into canine cancer, promising a better future for animals and humans alike.

THANK YOU...

"I am using this old picture of myself with Rayner as she is the reason, I got involved with Smiling Blue Skies (and OVC Pet Trust). Rayner was diagnosed with malignant melanoma in 2011. She was a patient at the Cancer Centre at OVC and received the most current diagnostics and therapy (surgery, melanoma vaccination) available. Because of Suzi Beber and SBS, OVC Pet Trust has been the recipient of more than \$2 million, money which has allowed ongoing improvement in the ability to diagnose and treat cancer in our beloved companion animals. Improvement in cancer diagnostics and therapies in one species, helps all species. Thank you, Suzi, and SBS for all you have accomplished and for the difference you have made in so many lives!!"

Dr. Doreen Houston,
Chair, OVC Pet Trust Advisory Board



"What an incredible milestone that Smiling Blue Skies is celebrating 20 years of such important work! As the clinical counsellor at OVC I work with many people whose dogs are in treatment for cancer and have seen what an incredibly emotional and difficult process these owners go through - it can feel lonely and sometimes hopeless. What Suzi has achieved through her work at SBS has given hope back to those people and their companion animals who need it most. Thank you so much Suzi for your tireless effort towards innovation and understanding in canine cancer research and treatment."

Sarah Bernardi
Social Worker and Clinical Counsellor
OVC Health Sciences Centre

"Every day we have the joy of seeing several pictures of Blues and BB King around the animal cancer centre, they always brighten our day."

Melanie Brooks and Vicky Heinbecker
RVTs, Oncology Service
OVC Health Sciences Centre



"Dear Suzi,

It has been both a pleasure and a privilege to have your generous and unwavering support of ICCI activities for all of these years. Your dedication and passion are truly exemplary, and I send you warmest congratulations and all best wishes on this important milestone."

Dr. Brenda Coomber
Professor and Co-founder of the ICCI



"Many Congratulations Suzi and Smiling Blue Skies on a truly amazing 20 years.

Words are not enough to express my thanks for all that you do and continue to do for companion animal cancer research at the OVC. It is an absolute honour that the position I love doing is funded by you! You are indeed one remarkable and awe-inspiring lady - we are extremely lucky and incredibly grateful to be long-term recipients of your generous support. The hope and benefit, whether it be directly or indirectly, we are able to bring to our clients and patients by enabling participation in oncology clinical research studies funded by OVC Pet Trust, is priceless."

Thank-you so much for being you,
Dr. Vicky Sabine
Clinical Trials Coordinator

"Congratulations Suzi for 20 years of achievements and contributions with Smiling Blue Skies! It is a privilege and honour to be a part of this amazing work that you support. Your financial contributions, dedication to our patients and the work which we are able to achieve through your ongoing efforts is incredible and would not be possible without you. Because of you and Smiling Blue Skies, we can offer hope to so many others through the studies funded by the OVC Pet Trust in companion animal cancer research."

Thank you for everything you do!
Deirdre Stuart
Tumour Bank Coordinator



THANK YOU...

“Suzi, Congratulations on 20 years of the Smiling Blue Skies Fund for Canine Cancer! Our research has benefited greatly from the tissues in the Companion Animal Sample Tumour Bank and the funding we have received through Pet Trust to use the samples. We have made several important advances in our understanding of canine cancer from using these banked tissues, but something that is perhaps less obvious is how they contribute to the training of the next generation of researchers. In the picture to the right (I am looking very sciencey, and a bit too serious) I’m discussing osteosarcoma with a PhD student in my lab, Courtney Schott. After finishing her PhD, Courtney secured a post-doctoral fellowship in San Francisco in a lab studying human osteosarcoma. I’m happy to say that she has just returned to OVC as a new faculty member and will continue her research on canine cancer, bringing with her cutting edge techniques from the world of human cancer research. This is just one of the many ways that your dedication and hard work has helped us in our research efforts.”



Thank you and congratulations again,
 Dr. Geoff Wood
 Associate Professor and Co-Director ICCI

“Dear Suzi and the Smiling Blue Skies community: Thank you for choosing OVC Pet Trust and the Ontario Veterinary College to benefit from your incredible generosity over the past 20 years. In my role as Communications Officer for OVC Pet Trust, I am fortunate to meet patients and their humans, researchers and clinicians who have been impacted for the better because of the difference you make and the support you provide in pushing the boundaries of health care and innovation. Thank you for your dedication and commitment to helping us improve life for pets and their people who love them so dearly. You are making a true difference and the world is a better place because of it.”

Ashleigh Martyn
 Communications Officer,
 OVC Pet Trust



“Dear Suzi,

Your generosity has made an incredible and extraordinary difference in the lives of so many of our beloved pets.

On behalf of the OVC Pet Trust Advisory Board, I thank you and the entire Smiling Blue Skies community for the invaluable support you have provided to OVC Pet Trust over the past 20 years.”

Sincerely,
 Roly Browning Watt
 Chair, Board of Patrons
 OVC Pet Trust Board



“There is so much about Smiling Blue Skies Fund for Canine Cancer that makes it so very special. Unfortunately, cancer has touched all of our lives. To give animals a chance for extended quality of life and better treatment options through \$2 million raised to support Ontario Veterinary College research, is a tremendous gift to us all. What we learn from veterinary research can help fight human cancer too, and we all win when we can spend more quality time with dogs like Cooper (pictured on left). Twenty years of dedication from the incomparable Suzi Beber and the many Smiling Blue Skies volunteers is truly incredible. Thank you Suzi and all who have made a difference through your generosity and kindness. May your skies be always blue and your smiles continue for decades to come.”

Julie Byczynski
 Director, OVC Advancement



“Thanks for your support which gives us the opportunity to investigate better ways to treat our veterinary cancer patients at OVC.”

Dr. Paul Woods
 Professor,
 Veterinary Medical Oncologist &
 Internal Medicine Specialist
 Co-founder of the ICCI



THANK YOU...

"I am so incredibly grateful for the amazing support that Suzi has provided to OVC and cancer research over the last 20 years. Through her support of the clinical trials program, companion animal tumour bank and research funding I can't begin to measure the impact she has had to so many pets and humans alike. Thank you for everything Suzi- you are an incredible philanthropist and person!"

Dr. Michelle Oblak
Associate Professor and Co-Director ICCI
Veterinary Surgical Oncologist



"I have had the great pleasure of working with Suzi and most of her Smiling Blue Skies event organizers over the last five years while working at OVC Pet Trust. This year my daughter Val, her dog Stella and I participated in the Smiling Blue Skies Virtual Calgary walk and had a great walk, while raising funds. Suzi and her team are amazing, very hard working and dedicated dog lovers who are devoted to raising money for the Smiling Blue Skies Cancer Fund. Congratulations to Suzi, her volunteers, event participants and donors for reaching the amazing \$2 million donation milestone!"

Sandra Valeriote
Administrative Assistant and Outreach Coordinator,
OVC Pet Trust



"Through the stories I am honoured to share, be it about the discoveries that are made here, or the patients I get to meet (like Bailey in this photo with me) and the passionate staff that care for them —each day I come to work I am reminded how lucky OVC is to have someone like you that is so dedicated to advancing pet health.

Thank you for everything you do Suzi!"
Jane Dawkins
Marketing Communications Officer
Ontario Veterinary College

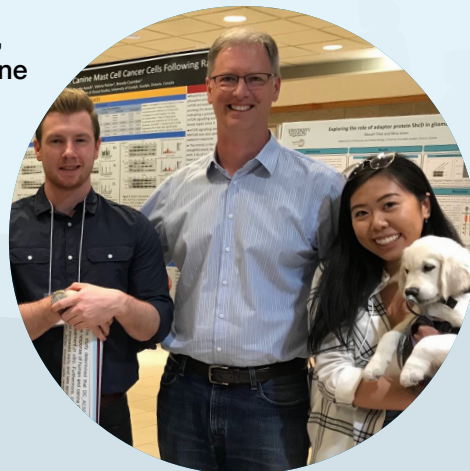


"No matter how little money and how few possessions you own, having a dog makes you feel rich." – Louis Sabin

Karen Tomchick
Communications Assistant,
Alumni Affairs and Development

"Congratulations Suzi on 20 years of Smiling Blue Skies, which has played such an important role in funding canine cancer research for so many! In addition to the gains that are being made to improve the outcomes for dogs with cancer, the funded projects benefit a wide array of graduate, undergraduate, and veterinary students in my lab, which in turn contributes heavily to the training of the next generation of veterinary researchers and clinician-scientists. We are incredibly grateful for your support and endless enthusiasm."

Dr. Anthony Mutsaers
Associate Professor, Veterinary Oncologist



"Thank you for your wonderful support for many years. Your contributions help to make better lives for our pets."

Roger Warren,
Founding member, OVC Pet Trust
Advisory Board





“*Long live blue skies,
where hope is a kite
and dreams really
do come true.*”

- Suzi Beber
Founder, Smiling Blue Skies Cancer Fund
Doctor of Laws (honoris causa), University of Guelph
www.smilingblueskies.com

Thank you for taking a bite out of cancer!





OVC Pet Trust, founded in 1986 at the Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph, is Canada's first charitable fund dedicated to the health and well-being of companion animals.

OVC Pet Trust honours the relationship between pets, their people and veterinary caregivers by raising funds to support innovative discoveries that improve the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases of pets.

Funds also help train veterinarians to provide exceptional healthcare for pets and provide equipment and facilities for the Ontario Veterinary College.

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