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Pet owners find solace in sympathy cards

By: DAVID HENKE, Staff Writer

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NORTHFIELD — On Friday afternoon, Tom Porter's desk is cluttered with pictures of his golden retriever, Libby. In one photo, Libby looks out over the shore of Lake Superior. In another, she strikes a regal pose, standing motionless for the camera with her head held high and her tail straight.

"She was a beauty, she was a potential show dog," Porter says, reminiscing about his companion of 14 and a half years. "She was my dog, so to speak, but she was a family pet."

Earlier this December, however, Porter and his wife Gloria were forced to make a tough choice. They decided to euthanize Libby, who, after a long life, was suffering from a potential brain tumor and a condition that causes painful arthritis and lameness in dogs' hind legs.

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It's a decision that faces many pet owners, who struggle between prolonging their pet's life, or ending it humanely. And, as Porter could tell you, it is never easy. But thanks to a long-standing tradition practiced by Cannon Valley Veterinary Clinic, some local pet owners like Porter are receiving some solace and sympathy when they need it most: after the death of their pet.

The clinic, which treats both large and small animals, sends out personal sympathy notes to any client who has recently lost a pet through euthanasia or natural causes.

"Because pets' lives are short relative to ours, pet aging and end-of-life issues are something that we really deal with on a day-to-day basis," said Dr. Rebecca Tollefson, a veterinarian on staff at the clinic. Tollefson, who treated Libby, made a point of sending Porter a personal letter of condolence after the death of his pet — a small gesture of support that she and the other

staff members of the clinic do for every one of their clients who is dealing with the loss of their pet.

"Probably there's always been an understanding in veterinary medicine that the loss of a pet is an emotional trauma for people," Tollefson said. The notes, Tollefson said, often help pet-owners gain a sense of closure after their pet has died, particularly if the owners choose to have the animal euthanized.

"I think most people appreciate knowing that we care, and that they are in our thoughts after a loss," Tollefson said. The personal cards, Tollefson believes, can be a helpful and compassionate reassurance for owners who may be struggling with their decision to euthanize their pet.

Porter, who received not one, but two notes from the clinic after putting Libby to sleep, said he was moved by the sincerity of the cards.

"Oh, did I appreciate that," Porter said of the card he received from Tollefson. "I thought it was very appropriate and very welcome."

— David Henke can be reached at dhenke@northfieldnews.com or 645-1100.

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