

South Bay Women of Distinction - Business: Dr. Amy Kramer

By Shanley Knox Staff Writer

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Dr. Amy Kramer shifted her physical therapy practice from people to pets in 2007.

The doctor said she first thought of the idea when her dog had difficulty walking following a common knee surgery her veterinarian recommended.

"He told me, 'You're a physical therapist, you figure it out,'" recalled Kramer, of Marina del Rey. "It took like a week and a half, and then she was going through the dog door like it was no big deal."

Kramer's research into the animal health field began with a dog anatomy book, where she discovered that the major muscles, ligaments and bone structure in a canine's body are almost identical to that of a human.

It was then she began looking for a veterinarian to partner with her in rehabilitating animals that were experiencing the same loss of movement Kramer had been treating people for on a daily basis.

"Nobody was doing it, so I thought, 'Why shouldn't I?'" Kramer said. "I started doing some research trying to find a vet that wanted to jump into a field that didn't really exist."

For Kramer, opening the Santa Monica-based California Animal Rehabilitation (CARE) clinic served as a second chance to chase after a childhood dream. She had previously expressed a desire to become a veterinarian, Kramer said, but her father convinced her she didn't have the stomach to work with sick animals, so she pursued physical therapy as an alternative.

After veterinarian Jessica Waldman agreed to

partner with her, Kramer opened CARE, the only clinic of its kind in Southern California, and one of only a handful in the United States. Three years later, she says the demand for their work has driven Kramer and Waldman to consider expansion.

Kramer said CARE focuses on treating clients holistically. Therapy includes recommendations for better nutrition and lifestyle habits, along with exercises and body manipulations.

Because they were working to get off the ground in the midst of a down economy, Kramer said she and Waldman strategically chose the Westside as the best location for their clinic, and focused on aggressive advertising. She said the greatest challenge has been convincing the veterinary community to respect their services, and to refer clients to their center post surgery.



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"We had to open their eyes to what rehab really is, and get them on board with how we can help them help their patients get better," Kramer said. "It was kind of like, 'Look guys, you're better off sending them to us, because if the owner finds us some other way, like looking on the Internet, they'll be mad at you for not sending them to us in the first place.'"

Despite its challenges, Kramer said her business has yet to see a down month, and has provided her with more joy than working on humans ever did.

"I tell people, 'Just pinch me, because I can't believe I've combined my two loves and made a career out of it,'" Kramer said. "I've never been happier in doing what I'm doing."

Shanley Knox 310-540-5511, Ext. 6390 shanley.knox@dailybreeze.com



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