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Summit Invites People of All Ages to THINK PAWSitive! Medical Experts Discuss the Health Benefits of Pets As We Grow Older

ATLANTA, April 17, 2003 — Do pets help keep us young? The answer to that question is at the heart of an upcoming Summit —THINK PAWSitive! 2003—featuring medical experts and scientific ‘proof’ that pets play an important role in helping people combat the rigors of aging.

Sponsored by PAWSitive InterAction, a non-profit alliance of animal-loving organizations in Atlanta, the Summit will feature presentations from renowned medical authorities and highlight research that underscores the therapeutic effects of interacting with animals as we age. Hosted by Emory University in conjunction with the Emory Center for Health in Aging, the Summit will be held 5:30-8:30 p.m, Wednesday, April 23rd, at the Woodruff Health Sciences Center Plaza.

“Studies suggest that pets can do more than keep you young at heart,” said Mayo Clinic cancer specialist Dr. Edward Creagan. “They can help keep your heart—and the rest of you—younger and healthier.”

As one of two featured Summit speakers, Dr. Creagan will offer insights into the science behind studies—including heart-attack survival rates—that validate the health benefits of pets. As Professor at the Mayo Clinic Medical School, Dr. Creagan prescribes pets as therapy for many of his patients and advocates ‘pets not pills’ as a tip for healthy living.

The Summit also will feature Dr. Rebecca Johnson, Director of the Center on Aging at the Sinclair School of Nursing, University of Missouri. Dr. Johnson will share current research on the neurochemical effects of human-animal interaction.

“Instinctively, we know pets make us feel good,” said Dr. Johnson. “Scientifically, we can trace those ‘feel good’ emotions to chemical reactions in people that are triggered by pets. Such chemical ‘triggers’ can enhance human health and well being in numerous ways, and provide insights into delaying the aging process.”

At the Summit, Dr. Johnson also will discuss her findings on the benefits of animals as a unique source of social support for the elderly.

With 76 million baby boomers in the United States, Census Bureau figures indicate that the 50+ population will more than double over the next 35 years. As more Americans than ever seek healthy ways to age, PAWSitive InterAction seeks to promote awareness and understanding about the important role pets can play in our lives at any age.

“The founding members of PAWSitive InterAction are bound together by a common commitment to promote and celebrate the human-animal bond,” said Nalini Saligram, Ph.D., PAWSitive InterAction Board Chair and Merial Corporate Communications Director. “From clinical research to real-world case studies, our Summit is designed to bring to light scientific ‘proof’ that pets are good for the aging population.”

PAWSitive InterAction promotes and celebrates the human-animal bond. Each member organization fosters opportunities for people to experience the human-animal bond. Founding members include Zoo Atlanta, Pets Are Loving Support (PALS), Happy Tails Pet Therapy, Atlanta Humane Society, and Merial. The principal activities of PAWSitive InterAction are an annual educational THINK PAWSitive! Summit on the health benefits of interacting with pets, and a white paper summarizing the scientific research presented. For more information, visit www.PAWSitiveInterAction.org.

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