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EXPANSION

UPGRADING PET CARE

Capital Veterinary Specialists brings new services
and educational facilities to the Panhandle

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The new hospital will provide advanced imaging services, including CT and MRI. Dr. Kevin Drygas (left) says the facility will also feature an underwater treadmill, pictured below, to support rehabilitation and recovery therapy.

Capital Veterinary Specialists is expanding its presence in Northwest Florida with a new advanced veterinary hospital under construction in Santa Rosa Beach.

The Tallahassee-based specialty practice broke ground on the project March 6 and expects the facility to open in early 2027. Once completed, the hospital replaces the organization's existing satellite clinic off Highway 98 and significantly expands the scope of care currently available in southern Walton County.

The first phase of the project includes a 20,000-square-foot hospital for dogs and cats on a 7-acre campus along Highway 331. According to owner and CEO Kevin Drygas, the prop-

erty is designed to support three buildings, including two additional 10,000-square-foot structures planned for future development.

Rather than positioning the project as a standard veterinary clinic, Drygas describes it as a regional referral center capable of handling advanced procedures and emergency cases that often require pet owners to travel outside the area.

"This will be like the Johns Hopkins of veterinary medicine," Drygas claims, "except that we treat animals."

The hospital plans to offer surgery, oncology, internal medicine, emergency care, and advanced imaging services, including CT and MRI. Drygas says the facility will also include





↑ Dr. Drygas (above right) and surgical resident Sandra MacArthur work side by side in the operating room at Capital Veterinary Specialists, where hands-on training and teamwork help prepare the next generation of veterinary surgeons.

four surgical suites, two procedure rooms, intensive care units, rehabilitation services, chemotherapy, oxygen therapy, and an underwater treadmill for recovery work. He adds that the inclusion of an on-site radiologist is intended to reduce delays in diagnostics and treatment planning by keeping imaging interpretation in-house.

Founded in 2012, Capital Veterinary Specialists has grown from a small Tallahassee operation into a regional referral practice with more than 100 employees and nearly 20 veterinarians across multiple specialties, according to the company. Drygas says the Santa Rosa Beach location could eventually support staffing levels similar to the Tallahassee hospital.

Part of that growth comes from a transport system the company launched in 2016 to move animals between Tallahassee and communities throughout the Panhandle, along with parts of Alabama and Georgia. The model allows patients in underserved areas to access specialty services without requiring owners to make repeated long-distance trips.

"If somebody can't come to you," Drygas says, "let's go to them."

At present, the company's Santa Rosa Beach clinic focuses primarily on dermatology, urgent care, outpatient services, and select exotic animal treatment. Drygas says the new facility expands operations to seven-day urgent care and eventually overnight emergency coverage. The project also reflects broader changes within veterinary medicine, where demand for specialty and

emergency services continues to rise while many regions face shortages of trained specialists and technicians.

Drygas says the practice hosts veterinary externs and works with veterinary technician programs, including collaborations involving Florida A&M University. Capital Veterinary Specialists is one of more than 70 small animal surgical residency training programs in the United States, according to the American College of Veterinary Surgeons.

"We currently support three surgical residents," Drygas says, "four rotating interns, and two specialty interns."

Sandra MacArthur, a third-year surgical resident, says the program combines rigorous clinical training with a strong culture of support in a high-demand field.

"Residents attend national conferences and trainings

and routinely implement new devices and tools into our workflow," MacArthur says. "A huge part of this is producing clinical trials, case series, and scholarly work that advances the field of veterinary surgery."

The organization also develops an in-house technician training program designed to prepare veterinary technicians for specialty assistant roles. Drygas says the one-year program currently trains five participants annually.

Even as consolidation accelerates across the veterinary industry, Drygas says the company intends to remain independently owned and referral-focused, working alongside general veterinary practices rather than competing with them. In his words, "Our goal is to support referring veterinarians and serve as an extension of their care."

MacArthur says the hospital's integrated specialty structure allows many surgical patients to receive definitive treatment within 48 hours, reducing delays that can occur when services are spread across multiple facilities.

As construction continues, the Santa Rosa Beach expansion is expected to add both clinical and support positions while attracting specialized veterinary professionals to the region. Drygas also expects the facility to generate additional economic activity as clients travel from surrounding communities for advanced care.

"It brings me incredible satisfaction to help patients," Drygas says, "and to support a large number of staff and veterinarians." ■