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BOB LEVEY'S WASHINGTON

An Animal Hospital That 'Gets' Compassion

With his usual precision, **Dick Barnes** reports that Shadow was "18.5 years old." That's ancient for a cat, but Shadow still had the moves. Whenever Dick pulled into the family driveway and Shadow lurked there, the cat would scamper out of harm's way.

One day last month, he didn't.

"As I was within about five feet of stopping, I felt a small bump," Dick says. "I got out and he was lying on the brick area to the side of where I park. He was moving just a bit." But only just a bit.

Dick hurried his precious pet to the Friendship Hospital for Animals in Tenleytown. The staff rushed the wounded animal into an emergency examination room. But it was too late. Shadow's heart had already stopped.

End of story? No, happily, only the beginning.

The veterinarian in charge, **Andrew Greller**, placed the cat in a private room so Dick could have a few last private minutes with him. The doctor explained cremation and burial options. He said there'd be no charge for the emergency visit since the staff had been unable to save the animal. And he expressed his condolences.

Two days later came the cherry on top: "a very thoughtful, hand-addressed sympathy card from the hospital," complete with "a handwritten note."

As Dick said, Levey receives "many accounts of terrible customer service." You don't know the half of it, my friend. But the service Dick got at Friendship was "exceptional," says the recipient of it. He wants the world to know about it.

The world hereby does, Dick. Thanks for the story. Condolences from this corner, too.

Why would a vet—or a veterinary hospital—go so far out of its way to soothe the hurts of a Dick Barnes? Said **Margot Kerr**, another vet at Friendship, "It matters."

Veterinary medicine is "very personal, and human medicine has gotten less so," Margot said. "All of us really strive to offer care for pets and owner as well."

Derek Woodbury, manager of communications for the American Animal Hospital Association, said his organization supplies condolence cards to veterinary hospitals across the country.

Derek said he doesn't know how many cards are purchased. But Margot Kerr said that most doctors at Friendship send them.

Long may they continue.

Meanwhile, in case you buy the idea that computers make everything on Earth better . . .

Stacie Larson was using the ATM at a grocery store in Alexandria. The machine belongs to Provident Bank.

Tracie was punching keys like a house afire when she noticed that she had "accidentally hit the button requesting to conduct my transaction in Spanish."

"Rather than taking the time to cancel and start over, I figured what the heck, let's do it in Spanish,

even though I have very little Spanish."

Stacie gets four gold stars for being adventurous. Provident gets minus-four gold stars for what happened next.

Transaction complete, Stacie left the store. Then and only then did she study her receipt.

It was in English.

Stacie's airtight analysis:

"If Provident can decide that it's worth their while to provide services in Spanish, shouldn't they also provide a receipt for that service in Spanish? This must be frustrating to Spanish speakers."

Vicki Cox, Provident's public relations manager, said a Spanish option on the bank's ATMs has been in place for only two months. "We're new at this," Vicki said. "This is the first step of a project." The bank is studying ways to provide receipts in Spanish. "By no means is this a finished project," she said.

It should have been finished on day one.

Metro is the seventh wonder of our traffic-choked world. Okay, it's stuffy and crowded sometimes. Okay, people cough on you and subject you to unbelievably boring cell phone conversations.

And yes, passengers are rude once in a while. But it's especially awful when rudeness lands on a person who's doing his best to be a team player.

James Politte rides what he calls "The Sardine Can"—otherwise known as the Orange Line. One morning three weeks ago, he was heading to work in downtown Washington during crush hour. The train was crammed to the rafters, as usual. James was wedged up against one set of doors.

When the train stopped at Court House, he got off to let other passengers disembark. Only a handful of people took advantage. But if James hadn't gotten out of their way, they might have ended up in New Carrollton instead.

His good deed done, James tried to get back on the train. But three "new passengers" who were beginning their journeys at Courthouse muscled onto the train ahead of him. Whoops, no more room. So terribly sorry.

"Thanks," said James, to their backs, as the doors closed and he lost five minutes of his young life waiting for the next train.

Plea to all sardines who are about to board trains: Please give those who get off to make room for others first crack at getting back on. You shouldn't have to waste five minutes because you're a nice guy.

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