



AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB®
**CANINE HEALTH
FOUNDATION®**

Discoveries

Fall 2026 | Vol. 123

Detecting Liver Disease in Labrador Retrievers

Learn how CHF-funded research
is working toward earlier, less
invasive detection.

Canines & Cocktails Has a New Home

New location, still an unforgettable
evening you don't want to miss.

Seeking 200 Female Dobermans

Help CHF-funded researchers
investigate the genetics behind
urinary incontinence.

**Advancing the health of all dogs
through knowledge and discovery.**



Message from the CEO

Dear Friends,

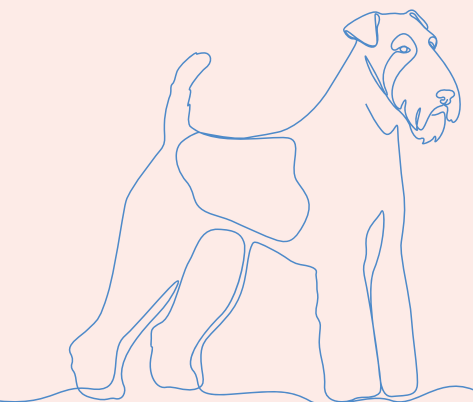
Fall is a season of gathering and change. We gather with the people we care about, celebrate what has grown, and look ahead to the possibilities before us. It's a reminder that progress doesn't happen all at once. It grows from many pieces coming together, each moving us a little further forward.

That's true of innovation in canine health. Researchers ask new questions. Dogs participate in studies that expand what we know. Veterinarians, owners, volunteers, and donors each play a role in making progress possible. When these efforts come together, knowledge advances, and we move closer to a healthier future for the dogs we love.

In this issue of *Discoveries*, we highlight innovation in canine health research and the many ways to get involved through research, volunteering, and events. Thank you for being part of this community and for making progress possible.

This season, I hope you enjoy time with the people you love and with the dogs who have a way of making every gathering feel a little more like home.

With gratitude,
Stephanie Montgomery
DVM, PhD, DACVP



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Where to Find Us:

**Dr. Stephanie Montgomery and
Dr. Laura Liscum Speaking at the
Translational Research Immersion Program**
Oct 16, 2026 – Oct 18, 2026
University of Wisconsin–Madison

The National Dog Show, Presented by Purina
Nov 14, 2026–Nov 15, 2026
Greater Philadelphia Expo Center
Oaks, Pennsylvania

**FCM Universal Championship AKC International
Dog Show**
Nov 12, 2026 – Nov 15, 2026
Expo Santa Fe Mexico
Mexico City, Mexico

**Canines & Cocktails &
The Discovery Award Reveal**
Dec 10, 2026
Hyatt Regency Orlando, Orlando, Florida

**AKC Royal Canin National
All-Breed Puppy & Junior Stakes**
Dec 11, 2026, Orange County Convention Center,
Orlando Florida

AKC National Championship
Dec 12, 2026 – 13, 2026, Orange County
Convention Center, Orlando Florida

Catching Copper

Detecting liver disease in Labrador Retrievers earlier and more easily.

By Dr. Stephanie Montgomery

Copper is normally found in the body, but when too much builds up in the liver, it can cause serious disease. Known as copper-associated hepatopathy, this condition can damage and scar the liver, often before any noticeable signs of illness appear. Cases are becoming increasingly common in dogs, with Labrador Retrievers among the most frequently affected breeds.

Tarini Ullal, DVM, MS, DACVIM, and her collaborators are recruiting Labrador Retrievers to change that. Ullal, an Assistant Professor of Small Animal Internal Medicine at the University of California, Davis, is enrolling Labradors with copper-associated liver disease and healthy Labradors in a CHF-funded study (Grant 03429) to detect the disease long before a dog shows any signs of illness.

Early results have already been surprising. High copper levels are being found even in the livers of dogs with normal liver blood tests. "Our preliminary findings show too much copper in the presumed healthy dogs as well," Ullal said. "These are Labradors with no symptoms and normal liver enzyme patterns - dogs that no one would think to test. It speaks to how pervasive this disease is."

While any dog can develop copper-associated hepatopathy, including mixed breeds, Labrador Retrievers are more commonly affected. The disease likely arises from a combination of factors, including genetics, diet, and how a dog's body metabolizes copper. Copper concentrations in the livers of dogs increased roughly threefold between the 1980s and the 2000s, a rise some specialists link to changes in how commercial dog food is supplemented with copper. However, the roles of dietary copper and genetics in copper-associated hepatopathy still need to be better understood.

Ullal's study is designed to explore that complexity. Rather than testing one factor at a time, her team measures copper in each dog's diet and examines



several layers of the dog's biology at once: the genes it inherited, which of those genes are switched on, the chemical traces its metabolism leaves behind, and where copper ends up, whether bound to proteins or circulating freely. This approach, which looks at multiple layers of biology together to reveal what drives disease, is called "multi-omics".

"To diagnose this disease at present, a dog has to undergo a liver biopsy under general anesthesia," Ullal said. "The goal is that one drop of blood will tell us everything we need to know." If the multi-omics approach works and researchers identify reliable biomarkers, a veterinarian could potentially screen for copper accumulation from a small blood sample and begin treatment before symptoms appear, when there may be a better chance of protecting the liver.

Healthy Labrador Retrievers and those diagnosed with liver disease are needed to help researchers find better ways to detect this disease. Owners interested in enrolling their dogs can contact the UC Davis Weill School of Veterinary Medicine Clinical Trials Team at vcct@ucdavis.edu to learn more about the study and eligibility requirements. To explore this and other active canine health studies, visit akcCHF.org/lead.

CHAMPS Taking Action for Canine Health

By Paige Hofstad

This fall, CHF's CHAMPS Ambassadors and FundRacers are turning their love of dogs into action.

On October 4th, CHF fundRACER and CHF researcher Dr. Susan Arnold takes to the streets of Minneapolis to run for CHF at the Medtronic Twin Cities 10 Miler!



In November, new CHAMPS Ambassador Noelani Randazzo will lead The Purple Paws Virtual Pet Walk in recognition of Epilepsy Awareness Month, in honor of her dog, Sully. Participants can walk with their pets, or in honor of a beloved pet, to log steps, raise funds, and support canine epilepsy research. Support Noelani's campaign @n0elaniiii.



Inspired to get involved? Explore CHF's volunteer community at akcCHF.org/volunteer.

Active Grant Highlights

Exploiting Doxorubicin-Induced Senescent Cell Stress in Hemangiosarcoma

Principal Investigator: Erin Dickerson, PhD;
University of Minnesota
Total Grant Amount: \$149,8420
Grant Period: 9/1/2026 - 8/31/2028

Hemangiosarcoma often returns after chemotherapy. This study targets treatment-resistant cells that may contribute to relapse, with the goal of making treatment more effective and extending dogs' lives.

Application of microRNA Profiling with Machine Learning/AI Modeling in the Diagnosis and Management of Canine Hemangiosarcoma

Principal Investigator: Janet Grimes, DVM, MS, DACVS-SA; University of Georgia
Total Grant Amount: \$29,900
Grant Period: 10/1/2026 - 9/30/202

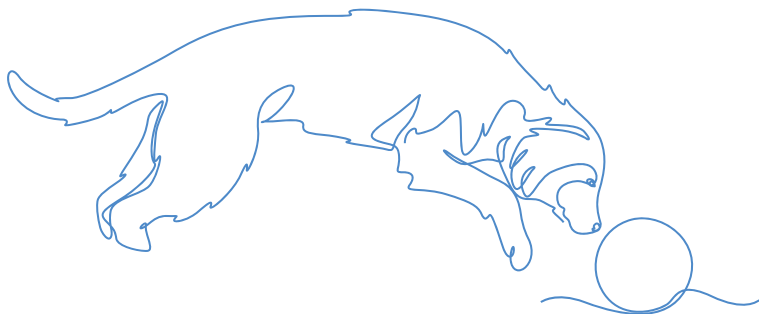
Researchers are investigating blood-based markers that could help distinguish splenic hemangiosarcoma from other splenic masses. Comparing tumors in the spleen and skin may also reveal biological differences that could inform treatment.

Multi-omics and Drug Sensitivity Profiling of the Largest Histiocytic Sarcoma Cell Line Panel for Novel Targeted Therapy Development

Principal Investigator: Benoit Hedan, DVM, PhD; CNRS-University of Rennes
Total Grant Amount: \$167,325
Grant Period: 8/1/2026 - 7/31/2028

By examining tumor DNA, gene activity, and responses to drugs, researchers aim to identify more targeted treatments for histiocytic sarcoma and lay a foundation for personalized care.

See our full research grants directory at akcCHF.org/research.





Dr. Baker, PhD student Teresita de Jesus Valdes Arciniega, and "Grace"

Wanted: 200 Good Girls

Seeking spayed female Dobermans to better understand urinary incontinence.

By Dr. Stephanie Montgomery

Most owners notice it the same way. Their dog gets up, and there is a small damp spot where she was lying. She leaked while she slept and probably had no idea it happened.

Lauren Baker, DVM, PhD, wants to hear from those owners. An early career investigator at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, she is recruiting 200 spayed female Doberman Pinschers – 100 that leak and 100 that do not – for a CHF-funded study (Grant 03424) to determine why the condition takes hold in some dogs and spares others.

That condition is urethral sphincter mechanism incompetence, or USMI, the most common form of urinary incontinence in female dogs as they age. It occurs most often in dogs that have been spayed, often within two to four years of surgery.

When it happens, the dog leaves small wet spots on bedding where they were lying, licks at wet fur, or dribbles urine. It is not a conscious choice, and it occurs far more often in some breeds than in others.

Baker is both a veterinarian and a computational biologist, and her dissertation focused on the complex genetics of cranial cruciate ligament rupture. Within that dataset, she identified a finding she wanted to understand more deeply. "One of the things we noticed is that dogs, once they're spayed or neutered, have a higher risk of ligament rupture," Baker said. "It's something I had to put into my statistical analyses to control for. But I just wondered why. What is it about being spayed or neutered that affects the ligaments?"

After her doctorate, in the urological career development program, a similar question arose in a different part of the body. Incontinence followed spaying and was more common in certain breeds. Baker turned to two of the largest canine health datasets available: Morris Animal Foundation's Golden Retriever Lifetime Study and the Dog Aging Project. The strongest signals pointed to genes involved in the extracellular matrix – the connective framework she had studied for her doctorate – now appearing in the context of a urinary condition.

Every organ has a supporting framework to which its cells attach. That framework matters throughout the body, from the cartilage at the end of bones, to ligaments and the urethra. If changes in this structure contribute to incontinence, the implications could extend beyond the urinary bladder and point to new treatment approaches, rather than relying solely on the current standard first-line treatment that targets smooth muscle. "It might show up as incontinence in a young dog," Baker said. "But maybe that dog that develops incontinence early is at higher risk for ligament rupture, or a higher risk for osteoarthritis later in life."

Baker is careful about how far those possibilities extend. Asked whether an incontinent dog is telling its owner something about the dog's knees, she emphasized that the findings remain preliminary. Determining this requires validating the results in a breed with an elevated risk for urinary incontinence, and Baker chose the Doberman Pinscher. She is working with Dr. Molly McCue at the University of Minnesota, whose Disappearing Doberman Project has already collected breed DNA.



Some owners may read this and wonder whether the answer is to delay spaying or avoid it. Baker cautions against drawing that conclusion from these findings. Deciding on breed alone gets ahead of the evidence because the underlying factors are not yet fully understood. As researchers uncover the genetics behind incontinence, the risk could eventually be included in a screening panel, helping owners and veterinarians weigh the risks for an individual dog.

Dogs and their owners have an essential role in moving this research forward. "We really do need pet owners to participate in these studies so that we can improve the health of dogs over time," Baker said. Owners of spayed female Dobermans in the continental United States are encouraged to contact Baker's research team at bakerlab@ansci.wisc.edu to learn how their dogs can participate. To explore other active canine health studies, visit akcchf.org/lead.

Your Dog Can Help Advance Science

Dogs and their owners make canine health research possible. Through LEAD, dogs can participate in studies that improve the health of future generations. Explore research opportunities seeking participants, including studies that may allow involvement from a distance. Your dog's participation could help researchers better understand disease and advance care for dogs everywhere.

Find current studies and eligibility details at akcchf.org/lead.



People Spotlight

A Lasting Force for Good

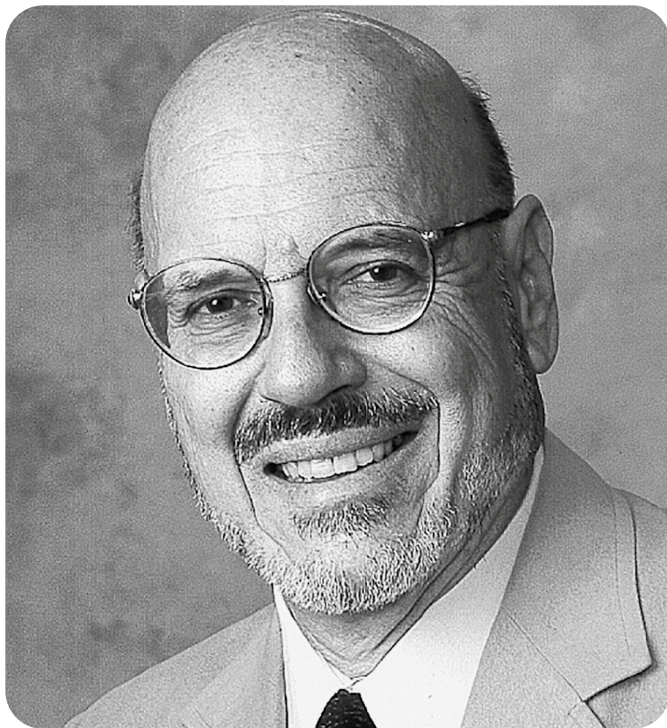
Celebrating Dr. A. Duane Butherus

A scientist's objectivity. A breeder's devotion. A colleague's humor. For decades, Dr. A. Duane Butherus brought these qualities together in service of healthier lives for dogs – and made a lasting impression on the people working alongside him.

Following Dr. Butherus' passing, colleagues reflected on the knowledge, perspective and dedication he brought to the canine health community.

Dr. Laura Liscum recalled the breadth of experience he brought to CHF's Scientific Review Committee: "Duane wore many hats as a member of the Committee - as a scientist, a breeder, past president of an AKC parent club, AKC judge and exhibitor."

His manner mattered, too. "Never condescending. He was a man that I respected," Cynthia Sansone shared. Susan LaCroix Hamil described his contribution as "a lasting legacy of excellence in furthering the health of all dogs".



“

I knew Duane for years. I found him to be scholarly and wise. Never condescending. He was a man that I respected. His passing is a loss to all of us.

— Cynthia Sansone

Together, these reflections celebrate someone whose influence reached through both the science he championed and the people he strengthened. As CHF Chairman of the Board Dr. Mary Smith expressed: "His devotion to dogs and to their health and welfare has provided an enduring legacy for good."

That good continues in the research, the people carrying it forward and the possibilities it holds for generations of dogs.

“

Dr. Butherus has been a pillar of AKC CHF growth and success for over 20 years. He leaves a lasting legacy of excellence in furthering the health of all dogs.

— Susan LaCroix Hamil



Steven Hamblin, Dr. Diane Brown, Dr. Duane Butherus, Dr. Jerry Klein, Dr. Fran Smith at Canines & Cocktails 2018.



Dr. Butherus with CHF Board Member, Dr. J. Charles Garvin, 2016.



Where Science Meets Performance

By Andrea Fiumefreddo

What happens when leading experts and a community devoted to high-performance dogs come together in a setting designed for meaningful exchange? CHF's inaugural Canine Health in Motion Symposium offered an inspiring answer.

Held in tandem with the 2026 AKC National Detection Dog Conference, this first-of-its-kind CHF event paired high-caliber faculty with an audience intentionally capped at 50. Three days of presentations, hands-on demonstrations, and expert discussion sessions brought cutting-edge science in canine performance, rehabilitation, and longevity to life with 14 hours of continuing education.

The intimate setting made the experience especially rewarding, with direct access to faculty, thoughtful conversations, and opportunities to learn alongside others who share the unique challenges of caring for high-performance dogs. Sponsored by AKC Pet Insurance and Animal Necessity Ocu-GLO, Canine Health in Motion brought CHF's commitment to high-performance dogs to life through an enriching exchange of science, experience, and ideas.





More Good Years. More Moments Together.

All Access with Andy Garcia takes a closer look at how CHF is helping create more good years for dogs.

By Dr. Stephanie Montgomery

As dogs grow older, the everyday moments we share become even more precious. Understanding how to protect their health – and the connection we cherish – is at the heart of CHF's investment in canine aging research.

This fall, All Access with Andy Garcia brings that work into focus, featuring featuring Dr. Natasha Olby, Professor of Veterinary Neurology & Neurosurgery, and Dr. Margaret Gruen, Professor of Behavioral Medicine at NC State College of Veterinary Medicine. Through a closer look at CHF-funded research into canine dementia, the segment explores the science helping us better understand aging dogs and work toward healthier years together.

Our behind-the-scenes photos offer a glimpse of the experience of bringing this story to the screen. A short segment premieres on Fox Business News on October 7 and the full-length feature airs on PBS on October 26.



Scan the QR code to watch the interview, then share it with another dog lover.



Canines & Cocktails

A new setting. More reasons to celebrate.

By Fleming Samuels

Join us on December 10, 2026, at the Hyatt Regency Orlando for an evening celebrating the science, generosity, and friendships that help dogs live healthier lives. This year, Canines & Cocktails moves to the Windemere Ballroom, bringing a beloved CHF tradition to a spacious new setting. Following a record-setting 2025 event that raised more than \$175,000 for canine health research, we have much to celebrate - and even more to make possible together.



*Special guests,
Chris Hardwick and Andrea McArdle.*

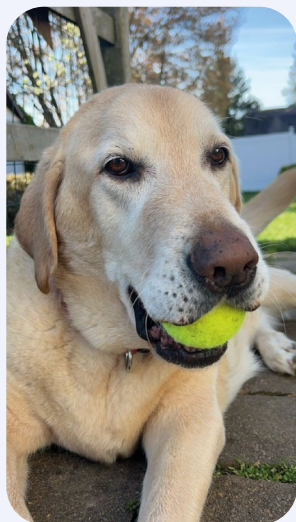
Enjoy a seated dinner, live music and dancing, our popular raffle, and the Discovery Award celebration honoring an important advancement in canine health. From the first cocktail to the last dance, there will be time to reconnect with friends, make new connections and applaud the people moving research forward. New this year, two VIP experiences offer special



ways to enjoy the festivities. Both include preferred seating, a champagne toast, and special recognition. One offers early access to the reception area with tray-passed hors d'oeuvres; the other includes an invitation to the Discovery Award VIP reception, where guests can meet the honorees along with Chris Hardwick and Andrea McArdle. VIP access is included with every sponsorship, with the experience determined by sponsorship level.

Complimentary golf-cart service will bring guests from the hotel towers to the ballroom doors. At the heart of it all are the dogs who give us so much – and the discoveries that could give us more time together. We hope you'll join us for a wonderful evening in their honor.

Watch your inbox for ticket and sponsorship information, and learn more at akcchf.org/caninesandcocktails.



Codie's Love, Carried Forward

A swim. A ball. A chance to follow his favorite person into the next room. For Codie, happiness was being close to the family he loved.

The gentle Labrador Retriever brought Stephanie Webb's family so much joy. When a complex vascular mass developed near his heart, treatment was challenging, and his sudden loss left an enormous absence.

In Codie's honor, Stephanie made a gift to CHF, carrying her love for him forward through research that may give other dogs and their families more time together.

Thank you, Stephanie, for your generosity and for entrusting us with this meaningful tribute to Codie. Your gift holds hope for more swims, more balls, and more familiar footsteps following someone from room to room.

Donor Spotlight

A New Kind of Giving

The founding women of WISHD bring experience, generosity and shared ambition to canine health.

By Fleming Samuels



Women Investing in Science for Healthy Dogs, or WISHD, a network of philanthropic women of the AKC Canine Health Foundation, built on the idea that a group of accomplished women who show up together can do more than any of them could alone.

Its members include executives, marketers, breeders, and lifelong dog lovers. They bring experience, relationships and a talent for making things happen, united by a deeply personal wish: more healthy years for the dogs we love.

In their inaugural year, WISHD members have raised \$80,000, with a 2026 focus on healthy aging. At their first annual in-person meeting this November

in Raleigh, North Carolina, they will hear from CHF scientists and leadership, review research opportunities, and decide where to direct their collective giving. It is an opportunity to ask thoughtful questions, exchange ideas, connect more deeply, and help promising science move forward.

That's what makes WISHD different. Its members bring their voices and vision to the work their generosity makes possible.

As Founding Members, these women are also shaping the circle itself – establishing its traditions, setting its ambitions, and inviting others to join them. WISHD grows from woman to woman, through personal connections and a shared belief in what they can accomplish together.

Eighty thousand dollars is already at work for canine science. And these women are just getting started.



WISHD

Interested in learning more about WISHD? Contact Fleming Samuels: fleming@akcchf.org
919-334-4023.



Upcoming Webinars

Learn more about protecting the aging brain, advances in digestive health, and the innovative research of this year's Discovery Award finalists.

October

Protecting the Aging Brain:
IGF -1 and Canine Cognitive
Dysfunction

October 20 at 7 PM ET

Dr. Evan MacLean

November

Understanding Protein-Losing
Enteropathy in Dogs:
A Genetic Exploration

November 17 at 7 PM ET

Dr. Sara Jablonski

December

Breakthrough Science:
Meet the 2026 Discovery
Award Finalists

December 1 at 7 PM ET

Moderated by Dr. Montgomery

For more information and to register, visit akcchf.org/webinars.

WOOF WORDS

Fill in the Blank Challenge

Think you've been keeping up with the latest CHF news? Put your knowledge to the test! Read each sentence and fill in the missing word or phrase. From research and events to programs and familiar names, you'll find all the answers within this issue of *Discoveries*.



Use the QR code to submit your completed puzzle by November 15th, 2026 for a chance to win a \$100 Chewy Gift Card!

1. _____ will be at a new location this year.
2. Copper-associated hepatopathy is an increasingly common liver disease in this dog breed but can occur in all breeds and mixed breeds: _____
3. On October 4, CHF fundRACER Dr. Susan Arnold takes to the streets of Minneapolis to run for CHF at the _____ 10 Miler race!
4. WISHD stands for: _____
5. Urinary incontinence is more common in older _____ dogs.
6. October's webinar will be presented by _____ and will focus on _____
7. Stephanie Webb honored her dog _____ after he was diagnosed with a complex vascular mass involving major blood vessels near his heart.
8. The inaugural _____ Symposium took place in early August over three days where attendees participated in various scientific presentations, hands-on demonstrations, and expert Q&A sessions.
9. AKC Canine Health Foundation partnered with the American Kennel Club Government Relations to connect the _____ and the first-ever Canine Health in Motion Symposium.
10. The Purple Paws Virtual Pet Walk recognizes and advocates for _____ Awareness Month.



👏 Congratulations to last issue's winner, Greg Thomas and his dog, Riley, from Mount Vernon, Ohio! Riley loves his **Lesure RealOrtho™ Dog Sofa**.

Help Make the Next Discovery Possible

Behind every advance in canine health are people willing to invest in the questions that matter. Your gift to the AKC Canine Health Foundation supports research into the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease in dogs of all breeds and ages. Together, we can help turn promising ideas into knowledge that improves care.

Give today at akcchf.org/donate. Help build a healthier future for the dogs we love.



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