



# Milton INDEPENDENT

{ Thursday, June 30th • 2011 }

## Foundation aims to treat canine cancer

By JACQUELINE CAIN

One July day last year, Ron Hatin was at home with his pets, the retired man's daily companions. He gave his 10-year-old lab a cookie bone, one of her favorite treats. As Emma took it from his hand, Ron noticed a lump on the side of her jaw. He called his wife, Tina, at work to tell her.

Thirty-two days later, the Hatins had to have their beloved pet euthanized. She was diagnosed with bone cancer.

Though they raised the 10-year-old yellow lab since she was a puppy, Ron and Tina Hatin



Photo by Jacqueline Cain

Ron and Tina Hatin hang out with their mutt, Mama, at their Milton home on Monday, June 27. The couple recently founded a non-profit canine cancer foundation.

didn't wallow in grief. Instead, they chose to help others enduring the same difficulty.

"How you direct your pain is important," Ron Hatin said. "We redi-

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## Emma's

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rected it in the right direction."

In February, six and a half months after Emma's death, Emma's Foundation received a 501(c)(3) tax exemption status, and the Hatins are several fundraisers into running a non-profit foundation devoted to helping dogs fight cancer.

### Few options, large cost

Last July, the Hatins had no idea the lump on Emma's jaw would profoundly change their lives.

Both the Hatins and their veterinarian thought it was an abscessed tooth, so Dr. Nicole van Herrevelsd at Milton Veterinary Hospital prescribed an antibiotic.

A week later, nothing had changed — except the lump got a little bigger. The vets performed a biopsy, Tina Hatin said.

"They didn't want to say the word 'cancer,' but you're pretty much left to know until they had some positive answers to the test," she said.

The results came back July 26, a full week later, confirming the Hatins' worst suspicions.

Van Herrevelsd explained to the Hatins their options: Palliative care to medicate Emma into a short life expectancy; surgery, which would gain 10 months but leave Emma without 60 percent of her jaw; or further treatment in Boston or Montreal, costing thousands without a guarantee of remission.

Overwhelmed, the Hatins sought opinions from two other area veterinary specialists; they faxed Emma's bloodwork to an oncologist outside Mon-



Photo courtesy of Tina Hatin

The Hatins' yellow lab, Emma, died last year because of an oral bone tumor. She is the namesake of Emma's Foundation for Canine Cancer, a non-profit organization founded by Ron and Tina Hatin this year to help people pay veterinary bills.

tréal.

"I wanted so badly to find an alternative solution," Tina Hatin said. "You kind of get desperate. You want to prove the vet wrong, you want to find a cure, you want to do whatever you can."

But each specialist gave the same daunting diagnosis: Unless they removed Emma's jaw, which would severely hamper her quality of life, extend it by mere months and set them back nearly \$6,000, the Hatins' only option was to make Emma comfortable and wait.

Milton Vet treats about 25 cancer patients a year (not including the animals that are palliated like Emma), most commonly for canine lymphoma, which responds well to chemotherapy, van Herrevelsd said.

Osteosarcoma, Emma's type of bone cancer, does not. The cancer cells in Emma's tumor regenerated 10 times faster than human cancer cells.

Like most pet owners, the Hatins didn't have insurance for Emma. Though they could afford the vet bills, they accepted that spending money on treatment wouldn't make a difference.

The Hatins met oth-

ers who went to lengths to treat their pets — one man's wife gave up some of her own medications to afford their dog's treatment.

"[The dog] was like a kid to them," Ron Hatin said. "That was hard to hear."

"We realized the dollar amount shouldn't be the reason you have to put your animal down," he continued, but sometimes, "Your choice is putting your dog to sleep. That's a hard thing to deal with. We wanted to make a difference because of Emma."

His wife agreed: "The compassion for the love of Emma just drove us to it," she said.

Van Herrevelsd visited the Hatins' Riverside Drive home on August 19, 2010, to euthanize their dog.

Emma's friendly disposition and eager curiosity prevailed, despite the baseball-sized tumor that had engulfed her back teeth and prevented her from eating or drinking anything — including her pain medicine — for the past 24 hours.

"We were sitting on the deck and heard the knock at the door at 4 o'clock, and Emma came running through the house, her tail going, just as happy as she could be that we had company," Tina said, with tears in her eyes. "Dogs do not show their pain and distress. For that reason, it was much harder."

### Wanting to do more

The months before and after Emma's death, Tina Hatin spent a lot of time researching canine cancer online. She found blogs and Facebook pages for pet cancer research, but she wanted to do more.

Emma's Foundation for Canine Cancer would be different: Instead of earmarking money for research, the Hatins wanted to help people pay medical bills directly. Research

doesn't necessarily help the pet owner whose dog had a \$6,000 chance at remission, the Hatins said.

"If your pet isn't in a study program, then you fall between the cracks," Ron Hatin said. "We're trying to fill those cracks so people don't fall through."

So the Hatins started fundraising. Much of it initially went toward printing letterhead and brochures and building a website, [www.emmasfoundationforcaninecancer.org](http://www.emmasfoundationforcaninecancer.org). The rest of the money will go to people who need help buying medicine or paying for surgery, they said.

The Hatins haven't put a cap on their fundraising goal, and they won't.

"We want as much help as we can possibly get. The need is huge," Ron Hatin said.

According to the National Canine Cancer Foundation, canine cancer affects one in three dogs. As veterinary medicine improves, dogs live longer, and older dogs are at higher risk for cancer, van Herrevelsd said. Milton Vet euthanizes an average of three cancer patients a week, she said.

These statistics will drive the Hatins to make a difference, they said. Their vet thinks the foundation will have a positive influence.

"Emma's Foundation can be at least a partial support," van Herrevelsd said. "A lot of these families can match the funds, or put something toward it."

Emma's Foundation has helped the Hatins through a lot of grief, and their new mutt, Mama, has helped the rest of the way.

The Hatins adopted Mama one month after Emma died.

"I came home one day, and I said, 'The house is too empty; I can't take it,'" Ron Hatin said.

"We talked with Emma as much as Ron and I talked to one another," Tina agreed, laughing.

The Hatins adopted Mama from a Huntington shelter, where a mother dog and her nine puppies all needed a home.

"We got down there, and the puppies were just so adorable," Tina Hatin said, but the puppies' mother, all scraggly and underweight, took immediately to Ron.

"We both agreed the puppies would get adopted out, but who was going to take her?" Tina Hatin said.

Ron Hatin said, "She's helped a lot."

"It's almost like she has an innate ability to know we needed her," Tina Hatin added. "We joke a little bit, but we think she's Emma reincarnated."