 Joanna Krol, DVM holds Lil Mama, a Chihuahua, and White Sugar Valley, a Havanese Poodle mix.



🐾 The Animal Care Centers of Barrington and Buffalo Grove will have a total of 60 staff members to serve their clients and patients.

OUR CREATURES Great and Small

Joanna Krol, DVM, brings her vision for the future to one of our community's longest running businesses, Barrington Animal Hospital

by **Lisa Stamos** 🐾 Contributions by **Laura Gregg, Holly Holder, and Stephanie & Michael Streisel**
🐾 Photography by **Linda M. Barrett**

An Interview with Joanna Krol, DVM

WE SPOKE WITH DR. JOANNA KROL about her family life, training, first veterinary clinic in Chicago, and the vision for her Animal Care Center and the forthcoming Barrington Animal Dental Referral Service.

Where did you grow up?

I'm originally from New York and lived there until I was 32. My family is still there. They came from Poland in the '60s and settled in Brooklyn. I come from a family of doctors. My father's father was a veterinarian, and my father, brother, and uncles are physicians.

Did you always want to be an animal doctor?

Well, not at first. I took a few detours in my 20s before settling down on the idea. I studied piano since age 5 and thought that music would be my

career at one point. Yet, I relied on my pets at home for emotional support in childhood. Growing up, that was my family. I began saving animals as a young child. If I saw a stray cat along the street, I would take it home. I've always had a lifelong love of animals.

Did your music career plans take a turn?

I first attended State University of New York at Stony Brook, where I completed all my pre-medicine courses. I did well, but felt the urge to do something different. I left New York to pursue a music degree at Indiana University. I wanted to be a concert pianist. That original plan didn't last too long, though. I saw the immense talent of the music students there and had a reality check! I realized that for a career, I'd need something more stable. So, I gave up that dream and completed a dual degree in music and biology.

How did the new major work out?

I had a great time at Indiana University. That's where I met my husband, Michael. After graduation, I went to New York and worked at my father's hospital, the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in Manhattan. There I was a research assistant for four years—trying to figure out what my next step in life was. I worked in the pathology department helping doctors with research.

Did you have other career aspirations at the time?

I originally thought I wanted to go to medical school. I applied to 15 medical schools that first year but was rejected from all of them. After that experience, I had to take a break. After spending a few more years working and realizing I wasn't getting anywhere, I sat down and wrote out a list of everything I could do with my life, with the pros and cons listed for each choice, including veterinary school. The list of pros for veterinary school was so long. After going back and forth for 10 years on what to do with my life, I had my answer in one night.

Where did you study veterinary medicine?

The Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. After that, I had an Internship in New York City at the Manhattan Veterinary Group.

What brought you back to the Midwest after receiving your DVM degree?

Michael and I decided to marry. He works at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine in the department of physiology and had a strong tie to his job. We decided to elope before I moved back to Indiana with him, then had a big wedding ceremony and reception a year later. We lived in Gary, where Michael is from, for a short while, then I got a job as an emergency veterinarian in Buffalo Grove. I worked odd hours and found myself at home when everyone else was working. This inspired me to drive around the area, and that's how I found Barrington.

WORKING ON THE FRONT LINES


You've worked in many clinical environments. What was it like being part owner of a Chicago animal hospital?

I always had ideas about going into business for myself. After working as an emergency veterinarian for a few years, I took this leap and started a clinic from scratch on West Washington Street in Chicago. There I had a wonderful partner and mentor named Dr. John Coyne. The clinic was open 7-days-a-week and functioned solely as a walk-in clinic. It was extremely busy. I felt like I learned an entire career's worth of knowledge in those years. It was very intense, like being on the front lines of a battlefield. But that experience paid back with incredible results.

My twins were still babies when I started that practice, so my mom moved out to Chicago to help us. I was working 90 hours a week for four straight years to make that practice successful, often from 6:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. I made a tremendous sacrifice as all working moms understand, but the practice grew so quickly, I really couldn't get away. It seems extreme, but I'm very grateful for that experience and its huge learning curve. We had 60 employees at our highest. This is where I cut my teeth on how to manage a large practice.

Then, Michael and I started seeing some of the downsides of spending our time in Chicago, most notably an increase in crime. And managing a walk-in practice began to take a toll. When it came time to put our kids in school, we decided to make a change. After seven years of owning the practice, I decided to sell it. It was a bittersweet turning point in my life but



 Michael Johnson and Joanna Krol both have medical training and can share the day-to-day moments of their jobs when off the job.

was a very important milestone. I've kept the original logo from the practice, the Animal Care Center logo which I proudly designed myself.

How did you end up living in Barrington?

When I was working in Buffalo Grove at the emergency clinic back in 2004, we got an apartment in Palatine while we were trying to figure out where to settle down. I remember taking Sunday drives up Route 14 through Barrington and my immediate first impression was "Wow, now this is the place to be!" There was just something so special about Barrington. We bought our house soon after in town. Years later, I approached Dr. Stapleton of Barrington Animal Hospital to see if she would be interested in selling her practice to me. At first, she wasn't ready, but once she realized she had to move the practice to a bigger venue with more parking, she asked for my help.

A VETERINARIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Being a veterinarian comes with stressors. What is happening in your line of work?


Right now, our industry is dealing with staff shortages at the same time as seeing a huge boost in animal ownership, especially since COVID started. This has wreaked havoc on our industry, causing high turnover rates in practices and promoting a stressful work environment. New veterinary schools are popping up, but it will take time for us to catch up with demand.

Also, in the various places I have worked, there were challenges in that animals aren't always well cared for. They don't receive vaccinations or are not spayed or neutered, which leads to disease and overpopulation. Often, the solution to these issues is animals ending up in shelters alone or euthanized. This is heartbreaking for us in this industry to witness. It's a tragic situation all around.

You said that the suicide rate for veterinarians is a huge topic today.

Yes, it is. Most of us who work in the animal industry, do it because we love animals. However, the reality is not all puppies and kittens. We are riddled with student debt, we have to euthanize animals that we were trained to save, and we are often paid half of our counterparts in human medicine, despite how expensive people think their vet bills are. Most pet owners still do not have pet insurance nowadays, so they are paying out of their own pockets for care. This means we are still a customer service industry. The demands are different, for example, if we don't get on the phone right away



 Joanna Krol and husband Michael Johnson with their twins, Marlon and Kaya at home.

with a client, we may get blasted online for it. We may also get blasted online for not giving away services for free. The list goes on and on about why veterinarians become disillusioned with this career. This and other pressures start to wear veterinarians down.

Have you experienced these kinds of challenges in your practice?

In Barrington, not nearly as often. This is such a great community because pet owners here do the right thing for their pets. Here, we get 90% compliance on vaccinations and other preventative services we recommend. People here are usually very nice and show appreciation more than usual, which is what makes this community so unique and a pleasure to work in. We work very hard and have studied a long time to provide the best service we can, and it inspires us to feel appreciated for it. Believe me, it goes a long way when people are nice to us!

THE VISION FOR ANIMAL CARE CENTER OF BARRINGTON

What types of animals do you care for?

The majority of our patients are dogs (93%) and cats (6%). We also see a small number of rabbits, guinea pigs, ferrets, and some birds. We also do housecalls and see a small number of exotic pets.

What is optimal care for dogs and cats?

I would like to see pet owners be pro-active and take more preventive measures. Most pet owners are great with vaccines, but then don't always give year-round heartworm and flea/tick prevention. These are preventive treatments that are so easy to use to prevent serious insect borne diseases. Also, we would like to see more routine dental cleanings to prevent tartar and gum disease. We are currently working on our pricing structure for routine bloodwork, spays/neuters, and dentals to make it easier for everyone to perform these procedures.

You have a dental specialty in the practice, which is a growing aspect of veterinary services. What are your plans for that?

Our dental specialty employs two veterinary dentists that manage advanced dental cases such as jaw fractures, root canals, and even things like braces. Dr. Caroline Washington was recently boarded in dentistry and will be leading the team. They receive referrals for dental cases from all over Chicagoland. This service has grown so much in the past few years. Right now,

we are in the process of creating a new entity, the Barrington Animal Dental Referral Service, so that it may one day fly on its own. We are planning to renovate the current location at 216 S. Northwest Highway to house the dental service on its own by next year.

What is the overall vision for your practice?

Our concept for the new Animal Care Center is to be a place where your pet's every need is taken care of. A one-stop shop. Just like children, animals need medical care, housing, playtime, grooming, and training. We can do all of this in our new building. We want to also focus on opening up an urgent care service, start a loyalty program, take our dental specialty to the next level—we are just getting started!


You've said your family is active in running the business.

Yes, they play a big role. My husband Michael is managing all of the properties we own, and the new construction and equipment. Our twins, Marlon and Kaya, help clean the hospitals on a monthly basis and are working this summer on various jobs. Marlon helps with our computers. Kaya wants to be a vet someday, so she's already volunteering as a veterinary assistant. Everyone has a role in helping the hospital.

You believe in giving back. What are your plans for that?

I do intend to give back. We feel very fortunate to be able to practice medicine in this community. We recently received a donation from a dear client who passed away. An amazing gift! We will use the donation to start up a foundation that will focus on giving back to the animal and science industry. We have already provided a scholarship to a talented Barrington High School senior who will be attending medical school in the fall. We have also donated to the Ukrainian Disaster Relief fund through the American Veterinary Medical Foundation earlier this year. We also aspire to provide vaccines/spays/neuters to underserved communities such as lower income neighborhoods and senior citizen groups. I am sure we will find many causes to get involved in.

When does the new Animal Care Center of Barrington open?

We are scheduled to open for Labor Day weekend! 

BARRINGTON ANIMAL CARE CENTER CLIENTS AND THEIR PETS

As Barrington Animal Hospital expands and moves into its new location at 353 W. Northwest Hwy. (former Fifth/Third Bank building), its name is also changing to the Animal Care Center of Barrington. We reached out to some clients who shared stories they wrote about their pets and the care they've received over the years.



Dr. Joanna Krol cares for Lil Mama, a Chihuahua.



Laura Gregg with
her pets Hashbrown
and Kiwi.

Laura Gregg

Barrington Animal Hospital has been a part of our family for over 25 years. The expertise, excellent care, and compassion provided throughout the years have gained our trust and appreciation. Our experience began with Dr. Barbara Stapleton who helped us with preventative general health and dental care to moments of despair when "Ashely", our Old English Sheepdog, encountered age-related issues. Dr. Stapleton's ability to accurately diagnose and provide options was remarkable. The veterinarians at Barrington Animal Hospital clearly explain the status of the pet's health, and results from tests performed, and take the time to help the owner understand and evaluate options.

I'd like to share a story that has touched our hearts. Our daughter adopted a rescue Corgi, who she renamed "Hashbrown". Unknown to us, Hashbrown had heartworm. Barrington Animal Hospital diagnosed the heartworm on his initial exam. Dr. Heather Williams treated and cured Hashbrown and helped us through the entire lengthy heartworm treatment process. Did I mention that Hashbrown lived in Baltimore where my daughter attended school? Barrington Animal Hospital worked with us so that Hashbrown could be seen when needed despite the logistics involved.

We also have a King Charles Cavalier Spaniel, "Kiwi" who first came to Barrington Animal Hospital as a puppy. The average life span for this breed is 9-14 years old. Kiwi is now almost 16 years old. At this stage in Kiwi's life, Dr. Williams is treating Kiwi for a neurodegenerative disease with his back legs, age-related kidney issues, and mild cognitive impairment. We are so grateful that Barrington Animal Hospital has been with us every step of the way helping ensure healthy lives for our pets!



Holly Holder and granddaughter Ella Garofalo with Drake, a White Poodle and Abby, a 10-month-old English Springer Spaniel.

and savoring every moment with our Stringer. Then, when the time came, Dr. Krol and her vet assistant came out to our home in Barrington Hills. It was the kindest way to say “see you in Heaven” that we could have chosen. As long as we have vets like Dr. Krol and the rest of her veterinary team, I’ll always know my animals will have the very best of care and love in their new state-of-the-art facility in Barrington.

Holly Holder

I’m certain I could write a book about Dr. Krol. She is a modern-day version of James Herriot, the English countryside vet who wrote about his patients and their often-colorful owners (“All Creatures Great and Small”). Dr. Krol is a little tougher, yet her kind heart is big enough for all of us to take refuge in when a life has been well-lived and when nothing is fair, and we can’t bear to lose our faithful companions.

After a lifetime in horses, dogs, cats, and many other animals, I have a real sense of what I look for in a veterinarian. I expect a great love for animals, razor-sharp intelligence, and not being afraid to use it. And a compassionate heart and soul. Dr. Krol embodies all of these qualities. She always gives me a sense of calm even when we both know things are not good. This was the case in 2020. I think it’s fair to say we all felt a lot of anxiety with the way the world was and our anxiety in our family was no different. We were faced with losing our beloved chocolate standard poodle to an aggressive cancer. Stringer was one of those dogs, a once-in-a-lifetime dog. We couldn’t love our animals any more than we do, but you know when you have one that has that extra something special.

Through expert guidance, we were able to make decisions that were best for Stringer. We were able to share one last year with him and it was a good year, a year spent loving

Michael and Stephanie Streisel

Barrington Animal Hospital has gone above and beyond to help care for our beloved animals. My husband and I have four cats—Fig, Olive, Ash, and Willow—and one elderly (adorable) dog, Lucy. We have had to manage a range both chronic and acute health issues among our animals so having a flexible veterinarian with readily available appointments is invaluable. There are multiple knowledgeable vets at the animal hospital that have helped guide us through our pet’s health concerns and issues. Barrington Animal Hospital has helped us navigate difficult decisions in a way most vets haven’t in the past.

Dr. Williams oversees most of our animals’ care and has proved herself to be an incredibly compassionate soul. Just before our out-of-state wedding celebration last year, one of our cats, Ash, was suspected to have a terminally ill condition (he’s since recovered). My husband and I were anxious, scared, and saddened having to leave him during this time not knowing his fate. Dr. Williams went out of her way to ensure Ash could be boarded at Barrington Animal Hospital itself so she could personally check on him and manage his care. We were so relieved to know he was in good hands, and we were so grateful for the staff who provided us with updates, photos, and lots of love for our cat. We feel confident recommending Barrington Animal Hospital to all of our friends and family.



Michael and Stephanie with their pets Olive, Fig, Lucy, Ash, and Willow.

