



CLINIC CHAMPIONS

Answering the Call

Becky Irving, CVT, has established a lasting bond with her community through search-and-rescue heroics, 24/7 care for police dogs, and a matching passion for her patients as a surgery technician.

VCA Rock Creek Animal Hospital, Aloha, Oregon



Before Becky Irving, CVT, and her dog Quigley made it to their first search-and-rescue disaster response, she could sense they were a part of something special. “When people are at their worst, it’s amazing to see how they pull together to be their best,” she said. “From people giving up their seats on the airplane for the dog to when you walk through the airport, people were handing you dog food, booties, gloves, and knee pads. When you got on scene, everybody was there to make sure that you and your dog were comfortable so that you could perform to your best ability.”



Irving proceeded to spend the next 4 days searching for bodies in the wreckage of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City following the infamous bombing at that site in April of 1995. What started as the chance to give her newly adopted husky/lab mix a sense of purpose turned into a passion that has held strong for more than 3 decades. This summer, Irving found herself in Texas to search for missing girls caught in devastating flooding.

“When you see a family that is destroyed because of a lost loved one or their concern for someone who is missing—whether it’s someone with Alzheimer’s, a little kid, a hunter—they don’t have the tools or resources to go out and try to look for them,” Irving said. “There is a community of people who are willing to get up in the middle of the night, miss work, take vacation days to go out and help bring that person back home or recover somebody who is deceased.”

Irving embodies that can-do spirit, taking on search-and-rescue work as an interest outside of her day job as lead surgery technician at VCA Rock Creek Animal Hospital in Aloha, Oregon. Growing up in “what used to be a small town” in Bend, Oregon, Irving raised sheep, rabbits, and show dogs; participated in 4-H and Future Farmers of America in high school; and worked with a local veterinarian. She was hooked, ultimately opting for veterinary technician school. She was thrown



COMMUNITY IMPACT

Becky Irving trains in rubble with her German shepherd Ruger (left) in preparation for moments like the 2017 rescue of River, seen above with Irving and her dogs Clara and Ava.

into the fire in the '90s, taking charge of the surgery department and training for her team. Today, Irving continues in a similar role while taking a special interest in providing veterinary care for local police working dogs.

We spoke with Irving about her career and her passion for working dogs.

TODAY'S VETERINARY NURSE: What are the major changes you've seen in veterinary medicine throughout your career?

BECKY IRVING: Medicine in general is better. The medications that we use are better. We now have multimodal drug therapies available that we can use to get patients under anesthesia, maintain their vitals, and prepared for a safer recovery. We didn't lose a lot of them back in the day, surprisingly enough, but the animals, I think, were more painful when they recovered. We also have come a long way in reducing the patient's stress, with the ability to send medications home with the client, so that they can give those before they come in and the patient is relaxed before we even start. That is a big, big plus for veterinary medicine.

I look back and we were doing 10 to 12 procedures a day in the same amount of time that now we're doing 5 or 6 procedures. That is a downside, but the care for

2026 TODAY'S VETERINARY NURSE CLINIC CHAMPIONS

Today's Veterinary Nurse aims to shine a light on inspiring stories with its Clinic Champions series. Each issue, TVN will honor a veterinary nurse for their contributions in community service, scholarship, advocacy, or innovation. This series will highlight unsung heroes who make a lasting impact on their patients and community.

At the end of the year, 1 of the 4 honorees will be recognized as the Clinic Champion of the Year.



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to nominate a
veterinary nurse/
technician.



the patient is better. Back then, you didn't put in IV catheters. You didn't dedicate someone to a recovery on a patient so that it was safe, you just put them in a cage and walked away and started your next one. So, we can't do as many procedures today, but we are better off. The patient is better off for us being more dedicated to their care.

TVN: What is your relationship with the local police departments and their working dogs?

IRVING: I'm going to try not to tear up about it. The police dogs are my passion. They do a lot for the community. Back in 2001, the Washington County Sheriff's Office wanted to know if we would bring on their police dogs. We developed a protocol on how to deal with police dogs, because they bite and some of them aren't used to handling, particularly by strangers. We wanted to make sure the staff is safe when police dogs are in the building, and that the officer is safe while we're handling their dog. A lot of them like to be involved while they're handling their dog, and we like them to be involved. Then, in 2016 we brought on the Hillsboro Police Department and last year we brought on the Beaverton Police Department. We have about 18 dogs that we treat on a regular basis now.

I have given them my personal phone number because they work 24/7, and we're only open here until 6 PM. Sometimes they have questions about whether they need to seek emergency care or their dog may be doing

ON THE HUNT

Irving, seen below with her bloodhound Cooper after he passed his Urban Trailing certification (left), dedicates much of her free time to calls for missing people (right).



Local Heroes

In 2017, Becky Irving and her German shepherd Ava found a 2-year-old boy named River who had been missing overnight in rainy, 40° F weather. Irving and Ava received a Life Saving Medal from the local police for their role in the rescue.



SCAN THE QR CODE to see a news report and explanation from Irving on how Ava tracked River's location.

something and they just want to know what to do about it. They're welcome to call me 24/7, and they do, and I respond to them right away. I also have taken up teaching them first aid and field trauma. When the new dogs and handlers come in, I go in and teach a class to the entire school. Sometimes I'll have 25 dog handlers in my classroom, and I teach them how to treat the dog in the field, even give Narcan or subcutaneous fluids until they can get to us or an emergency clinic.

TVN: Has there been a particular story where this training has paid off?

IRVING: Absolutely. The Washington County Sheriff's Office has a narcotics dog named Mando, and he ingested some methamphetamine while out on a call. His handler gave me a call right away and said, "Hey, Mando ingested methamphetamine. I've just given him Narcan." And I had just schooled him on how to use the Narcan. I said, "Great, give him his Narcan again.



Give it again en route, because I'm sure it's not going to be enough, and then you need to get him to a veterinary emergency practice right now. Don't come here. I want you to go to an ER, because he's going to need to be monitored, probably IV fluids for maybe even several days." He was able to give 2 doses of that Narcan and get him to a veterinary hospital, and he recovered fine. He didn't have any issues.

TVN: You and your dog Ava received a Life Saving Medal from the Portland police for finding a 2-year-old boy who had been lost for 12 hours. What was that moment like when you realized you had found him?

IRVING: When you're in the moment, your main concern is finding the little boy. It doesn't matter when people said that other teams had already searched that area. You've got to trust your dog and your team. Just because it was covered doesn't mean that it was covered to your specifications. I literally found him 2 blocks from his house behind a store, and he had been out for well over 12 hours in 40° weather, and it was raining. This little boy would not have made it too much longer before we discovered him.

But the whole reason I do this is I still have a relationship with that boy and his grandmother. He lives with his grandparents in Arizona, and they send me birthday pictures and school pictures. Anything that River (the boy) does, they send me a picture and let me know how he's doing. Grandma follows me on Facebook, so she's always like, "Hero, Hero, Hero." I don't consider myself a hero, but she does. And I got to meet River properly when he was 4, and we took him to a balloon festival, and he got to meet the dogs. Ava got to meet him before she passed. That's the reason why we keep doing this.

TVN: Both your job and main hobby outside of work sound like they can be emotionally taxing. How are you able to balance your passions?

IRVING: Search and rescue is my stress reliever from my job. I love working with dogs, and I love training and helping other teammates train their dogs. While I have a stressful job in making sure that patients recover from anesthesia and trying to get as many surgeries in safely as I can, when I go home and I'm taking a walk with my dogs out in the woods or on a trail, that is a stress reliever. Even though I'm doing training or search and rescue and I'm trying to find somebody, that's actually my calming moment. It centers me to be out there working with my dogs. — *By Andy Zunz* **TVN**

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