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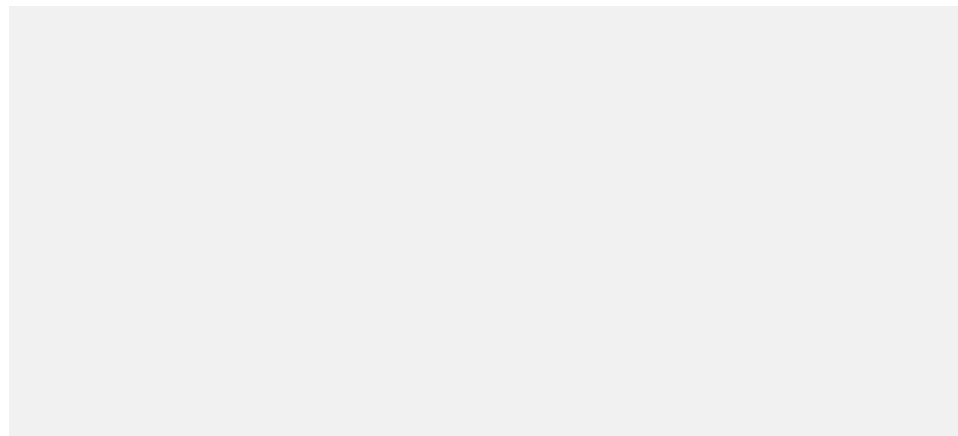
Medical procedure may help 9/11 search-and-rescue dog

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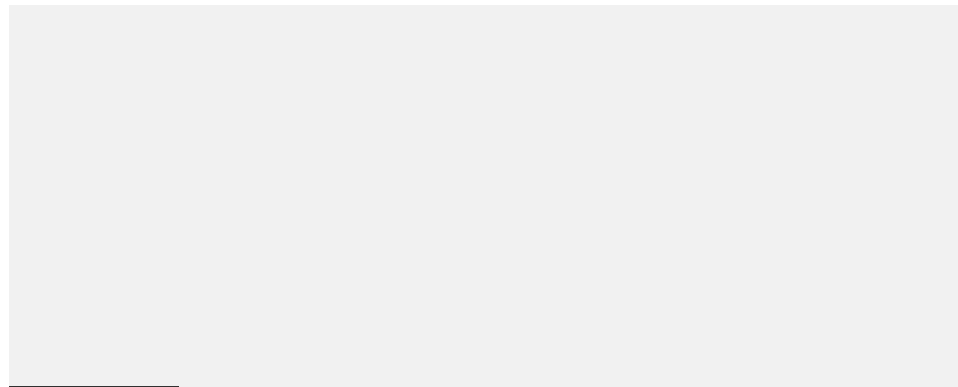
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Hoke, a search-and-rescue dog for nine years, has been hobbled by arthritis. On Thursday, he underwent a stem-cell procedure designed to correct his condition. / Walt Winter / For The Star 2004 file photo



Written by
Shari Rudavsky

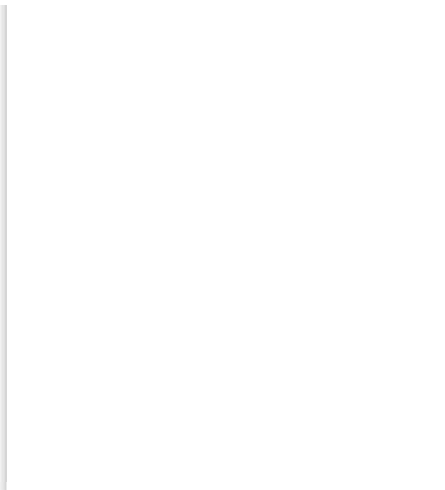
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For nine years, Hoke served humans, heading into disaster areas to perform search-and-rescue missions. Now, humans have their chance to help the yellow Labrador, with a state-of-the-art stem-cell procedure aimed at easing his arthritis.

The Lebanon-based canine, one of about a dozen surviving 9/11 search-and-rescue dogs, underwent the procedure Thursday at the Western Veterinary Clinic in South Bend to correct a condition that has hobbled him in recent years.

Developed by MediVet America, a Kentucky-based animal health company, the procedure entails removing fat tissue from an animal. Adult stem cells are then extracted from the tissue over a period of time, using a patented light system. A veterinarian then re- injects the stem cells.



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Hoke entertained first-graders at College Wood Elementary School in Carmel in 2004. One of the yellow Labrador's first missions was at the World Trade Center after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. "There were firefighters who had lost everyone they knew," recalled Julie Noyes, his trainer. "The dog would pass and they would cry into the dog, and that was hard for him." / Walt Winter / For The Star 2004 file photo

Over the next days and weeks, if all goes well, the stem cells will develop into healthy cartilage, muscle or ligament cells, poised to repair whatever damage exists, said Dr. Chris Persing, the doctor who performed Hoke's procedure.

Hoke had stem cells injected in both of his hips and received an intravenous infusion in the hope that it can ease some neurological spine damage.

"Those cells will travel throughout the bloodstream and follow the signals of inflammation, wherever he may have a pain response," Persing said. "Those cells will migrate to that area and be able to replicate and repair as best they can the areas that are showing inflammation."

MediVet America donated the treatment to Hoke in recognition of all that the 13-year-old dog has done. Last month, another 9/11 search-and-rescue dog underwent the treatment.

Hoke was Persing's 16th patient since April, when he started offering the treatment, which generally costs \$2,200 to \$2,400. Persing said his patients have experienced a range of results, from moderate to dramatic improvement.

As of Thursday evening, Hoke was resting comfortably, and Persing said he expected him to return home today.

Home and work have always been Hoke's favorite places to be, said Julie Noyes, his trainer. One of his first missions was at the World Trade Center.

At the time of the terrorist attacks, Hoke and Noyes were living in Colorado. But much of his training occurred in Indiana, in places



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such as the Hanson quarry, where piles can be up to 20,000 square feet.

Hoke found a lot of great fun, but the World Trade Center was different, Noyes said.

"It's not that he wasn't used to the size, but this wasn't a game anymore," she said. "On the real thing, someone's going to die unless you do your job."

For six days, Hoke and Noyes spent long days at the site. Soon after they arrived, it became clear there was little hope of finding survivors.

While the work was physically hard, it was also emotionally taxing for both dog and trainer, Noyes recalled.

"There were firefighters who had lost everyone they knew," she said. "The dog would pass and they would cry into the dog, and that was hard for him."

Hoke spent nine years as a rescue dog, helping after Hurricane Katrina, tornadoes, wildfires and in wilderness searches.

Last year, he retired. Noyes wanted to do something for him after he did so much for others.

"I feel like he took so much pain away by finding loved ones, and it would be cool if that would be returned," Noyes said.

Call Star reporter Shari Rudavsky at (317) 444-6354.

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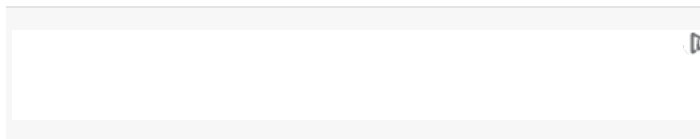


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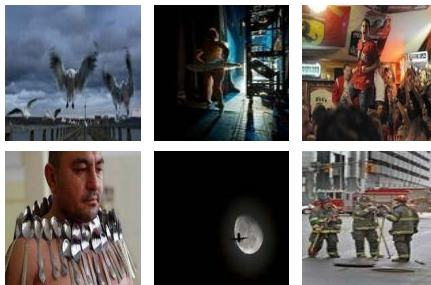
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