

➤ PORTRAIT // DR. REX SENTELL

## ANIMAL INSTINCTS

Dr. Rex Sentell has put *The Palm City Animal Medical Center* on the map.

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY DIANE DULTMEIER

Even animals are relaxed in this veterinarian's waiting room.

A calming water fountain – with a statue of a young boy and a puppy balancing on a log – bubbles behind park benches, while on a recent day a bichon frisé with little red bows in her fur and a black Labrador puppy tugged at their owners' leashes, hoping to sniff each other. A fluffy, orange tabby cat – safe in a carrier – looked on.

It was a scene that Dr. Rex A. Sentell imagined in 2005, when after 24 years of building a well-respected practice in the smaller building next door, he started working toward construction of the 13,700-square-foot Palm City Animal Medical Center on Mapp Road. Opened in January, this comprehensive animal care facility includes everything from surgery to exams, high-quality food sales to physical therapy, grooming to boarding and even a standalone pharmacy.

"I wanted people and pets to feel comfortable in a family environment," says the Palm City resident. "It's not the building. My dream is my employees and I taking care of the clients and their animals. This building is the way we can do that."

Born in Tennessee, Sentell completed his degree in veterinary medicine at The University of Tennessee before discovering the opportunity to move to Palm City in a national trade magazine. Another veterinarian had a second office on Mapp Road and searched for another doctor to run it. Sentell jumped at the chance and moved to Palm City where he quickly became active in the community. Since moving there in the early '80s, he's been a member of the Rotary Club of Stuart-Sunrise and the Palm City Chamber of Commerce.

After he bought out the other veterinarian's office in 1986, it didn't take long for his practice to burst at the seams. He began purchasing land and envisioning his new, state-of-the-art facility. Today, three veterinarians and an internal medicine specialist work with him with the best technology to help the community's pets. The office houses a CT scan, laser therapy and surgery, endoscopes, an ultrasound machine and much more.

"I didn't want to cut corners," he says. "But it's not the big things that people do in business. It's the little things."

For example, each of the luxury boarding rooms for dogs is decorated in a theme reminiscent of a place Sentell has visited,



like Santa Fe, the Bahamas and the Smoky Mountains. Families receive postcards from the dog during the stay. For those who must part permanently with a sick animal, there's a special comfort room with a separate exit to the parking lot. Those families receive a plaster paw print to remember their animal.

So it's not surprising that his business has grown by word of mouth.

"I attribute it to doing the best job I can for my clients," he says.

And the 59-year-old has no intention of retiring. With his children grown, he and his wife, Susan, relax by flying in Sentell's private airplane to destinations where Sentell takes photographs (often underwater) that adorn his office walls. They also spend time with their own pets: a dog named Winston, a cat named Stella, adopted six-toed cats who live at the medical center, two birds and fish. ■