

# EMPIRE SUNDAY

## INSIDE FORUM, B7



### PRESIDENT CEDED CONTROL ON RESCUE

The Economist magazine says the stimulus could have broken the cycle of gloom, but politics kept it from its full potential **B7**

### WHY NEWSPAPERS MATTER

Pete Golis says that in an online world, real news-gathering still has a place **B7**

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## Economic hardship falls on family pets, too

### VOICES



Dr. Nancy Kay has been a veterinarian at VCA Animal Care Center in Rohnert Park for 13 years

**T**oday the human-animal bond is stronger than ever. Seemingly, the more tumultuous the world around us, the tighter we cling to our beloved pets. They soothe us with their predictability and unconditional love, and they consistently give in excess of what they receive.

Imagine then, the heartache one feels when it's necessary to cut back on a pet's health care because of financial hardship.

Last week I worked with Joan and her 10-year-old Labrador, Rudy, who still acts like a puppy. They are devoted to one another, and Joan has always done everything possible to care for her best buddy's health. Rudy had been vomiting and not finishing his

meals (keep in mind, most Labs would quit breathing before they quit eating). When I mentioned blood tests and X-rays, Joan began sobbing and expressed profound guilt and worry because she was unable to afford these diagnostics.

Like so many others in this diseased economy, Joan recently lost her job, depleted her financial reserves, and was in the midst of foreclosure. I gave Joan a big hug, told her how much I appreciated her candor and reassured her that a diet change and medication to soothe Rudy's stomach might be the solution. She will call me with an update next week.

If you are feeling a financial pinch (who isn't these days), here are some things you can do to economize while

still caring for your pet's health.

When talking with your vet, lay your financial cards on the table. Yes, this is difficult (talking fleas is one thing, having a candid conversation about your bank account is whole 'nother ball game), but know that such discussion can open doors to options that make better financial sense. Rarely is there only one way to diagnose or treat a disease. You are entitled to an explanation of the risks and benefits of every single option, regardless of your financial status.

Request a written cost estimate before services are provided. In no way does this reflect how much you love your pet; you are simply being fiscally responsible.

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## VOICES: Consider options before euthanizing animal

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Learn about all of your payment options.

Consider investing in pet health insurance, especially if you are inclined to take the "do-everything-possible" approach.

Don't neglect the preventive care that could save you money in the long run. Administering heartworm preventive is less expensive for you (and safer for your dog) than treating heartworm infection.

What should one do if forced to contemplate euthanasia for a pet solely because of financial constraints?

Before succumbing to such a drastic decision, I strongly encourage thoroughly investigating every other conceivable option. Consider coming up with a creative payment plan such as bartering serv-

ices or goods, researching dog or breed-specific rescue associations, borrowing money from friends or relatives (borrowing from a bank might be a silly suggestion these days), applying for a donation from a pet health assistance organization, or finding a new, financially capable guardian for your pet.

Such exploration of options might just save a life and will do wonders for everyone's peace of mind.

*Dr. Nancy Kay, a specialist in small animal internal medicine, is the author of Speaking for Spot: Be the Advocate Your Dog Needs to Live a Happy, Healthy, Longer Life. She can be reached at [www.speakingforspot.com](http://www.speakingforspot.com).*

Speaking for  
**SPOT**

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Live a Happy, Healthy, Longer Life

100s  
of tips for  
the savvy  
dog lover

Dr. Nancy Kay  
Specialist, American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine

Ask the right questions to get the right answers!