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## Montello veterinarian offers Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine treatment choices

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The muscles quivered on the back of the big quarter horse mare as Dr. Roxanne Rygiewicz, Montello veterinarian, ran a plastic tube along the spine and down the horse's legs. When the horse flinched, Rygiewicz memorized the spot and said, "Yep, she's showing some pain there."

Mariah, a retired 18 year old lesson horse now owned by the Montello veterinarian, stood munching hay as her owner pulled out a box of two inch long acupuncture needles and, one by one, pushed them into horse flesh following the meridians, or energy pathways, taught in Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine.

Dr. Roxanne (Roxie) Rygiewicz holds one of the resident office cats at River Valley Veterinary Services in Montello. Rygiewicz now offers Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM) treatment choices including acupuncture, herbs and nutrition therapy.

Rygiewicz has been practicing veterinary medicine at her River Valley Veterinary Clinic in Montello since 1997. She received her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) degree from the University of Illinois in 1995, with an emphasis in large animal medicine. Today, her practice is mostly companion animals which includes horses, but she still treats a fair number of large animals. In her quest to expand the options open to the owners of her patients and to be able to offer a greater range of treatment choices, the experienced vet has been studying Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine with Dr. Shen Xie at the Chi Institute of Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine in Reddick, Florida. The Montello veterinarian is on the road to becoming certified in this practice and presently offers acupuncture, food therapy and herbal treatment choices.

The Chi Institute of Chinese Medicine, Inc. was founded in 1998 by Dr. Xie (pronounced Shay) and is, according to its website, the leading provider of continuing education of Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM). It offers basic and advanced programs for veterinarians in acupuncture, herbal medicine, diagnostics, Tui-Na, and food therapy as well as conferences and a Master's Degree in TCVM. The institute believes in integrating TCVM and conventional veterinary medicine and has trained over 2,000 licensed veterinarians in the US, Europe, Canada and Japan. The institute's faculty includes a number of experienced veterinarians in several states with practices varying from exotic animals to wildlife rehabilitation. The website for more information is [www.tcvm.com](http://www.tcvm.com).

Dr. Rygiewicz grew up on a farm in Illinois and knew she didn't ever want a desk job. Although her farmer father wouldn't let her have a horse, she said, "I rode pigs, I rode cows, I knew some day I'd have a horse." She lives with husband Richard J and sons Robbie and Jimmy outside of Montello and today owns four horses including Mariah, the acupuncture patient, and a 10 year old half Belgian, half Kentucky mountain horse, 16 year old Percheron, and a nine year old half Arab, half Kentucky mountain horse.

Choosing veterinary medicine for a career, she said, may have had to do with her love for puzzles.

"I love puzzle and medicine is like a puzzle only all the pieces are blank," she said. "You have to figure out what's on them and find ways to put them together."

Figuring out the pieces has led her to seek out alternate ways to treat the animals she sees every day. She describes herself as, "I'm not a pill pusher," and while she believes in Western veterinary practice, she also believes there are often other



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Acupuncture, a treatment of Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine, begins with individualized assessment of each patient. Placement of acupuncture needles are along meridians of energy flow and work to balance or release the flow of energy. Acupuncture is a much studied, effective, and accepted treatment choice for many conditions.



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Dr. Roxanne Rygiewicz runs low voltage electricity to acupuncture needles placed in Mariah, an 18 year old quarter horse who showed pain in her rear flank during a pre-treatment scan. The Montello veterinarian owns River Valley Veterinary Services and offers holistic treatment choices including Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine like acupuncture.

travelling with the President's entourage and received acupuncture for post-operative pain. Reston was so impressed with the effect of acupuncture that he wrote about it following the trip. In 1997, the US National Institutes of Health recognized acupuncture as a mainstream medicine and released a statement documenting its safety and effectiveness in treating a range of health conditions including pain relief.

Acupuncture has been and still is, widely studied. The University of Maryland Medical School's website reports that it is theorized that the nerve fibers stimulated by acupuncture needles transmit signals to the brain and spinal cord, activating the body's central nervous system. Brain image studies have shown that acupuncture increases pain tolerance and other studies show that the practice may also increase blood circulation, body temperature, white blood cell activity, reduce cholesterol and triglyceride levels and help regulate blood sugar levels.

Traditional Chinese Medicine is based on qi, pronounced chee, which is the life force or energy that flows through the body along pathways called meridians. Proper flow of qi maintains balance and health. If qi is blocked or there is an imbalance of the energy, health can be affected. Acupuncture restores the balance and flow of qi by placing needles along points in the body where this energy flow is close to the surface. The needles are placed on meridians identified in the 2,000 year old study of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Practitioners decide where to place the needles after collecting information about each individual patient. Sometimes, needles are heated or electricity is passed into the needles.

"Dr. Xie said that Chinese acupuncture practitioners often use six inch or four inch needles on equine patients," said Rygiewicz. She uses individual use two inch needles that she has learned to push and spin into place with nary a notice by the animal. Then, depending on the need and the animal, she clamps wires into some of the needles and applies a low volt electrical charge that some human recipients of acupuncture describe as a tingling sensation. The qi, or energy flow, is brought back into balance and relief of symptoms can often be seen in just one treatment. How many treatments an animal receives is dependent on the condition, response and choice of the owner.

Quarter horse Mariah who flinched when the doctor ran the plastic tube across one point on her rear end never stopped eating at the hay during her acupuncture treatment. She jumped once when the electricity was applied, but went quickly went back to finding more hay, leaving the electricity to run between the needles. After the treatment, Dr. Rygiewicz again did the scan, scraping the plastic tube across the horse's flank and this time, Mariah didn't flinch when the instrument hit the sensitive spot.

"Eighty percent of TCVM treatment is food therapy and herbs," said Rygiewicz. "The other 20 percent is acupuncture and Tui-na, a therapeutic massage. I'm very excited about being able to offer information and TCVM treatment so people and their pets can have a much higher quality of life together."

choices.

"I really want to improve the quality of life for both the owner and the pet," she said while talking about her added treatment offerings of acupuncture, herbs and nutrition therapy. "Pets or people aren't assembly line products and shouldn't be treated that way. Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine begins with individualized care."

Rygiewicz has been using herbs and offering information about nutrition in her practice for some time. She recently saw success healing a serious wound on a dog using Echinacea and olive oil and believes many pets could see relief from allergy and skin afflictions through TCVM.

"The quality of life for the pet and the owner if the animal could get off prednisone which is frequently prescribed for skin disease would be immeasurable," she said.

She's especially excited about completing her training in acupuncture and its success at treating a variety of conditions in animals. Acupuncture gained notice in the United States in 1972 when then President Nixon made his historic trip to China. New York Times reporter James Reston underwent an emergency appendectomy while