

NEWS

## Rancho Santa Fe resident is new chair of Magdalena Ecke Family YMCA board

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By Arthur Lightbourn

Family is the operative word in the life of Rancho Santa Fe resident Dr. Michele Drake.

At home, she has a family of “two cats, two dogs, two boys and one husband.”

At work, she has an extended family of hundreds of dogs, cats, hamsters, guinea pigs, and all manner of small creatures.



Michele Drake (Photo: Jon Clark)

She’s a veterinarian and owner of The Drake Center for Veterinary Care, a thriving 3,000-sq.-ft. full service veterinary care center for family pets in Encinitas and North County.

She’s also the recently elected chair of the 20,000-member Magdalena Ecke Family YMCA in Encinitas, one of the most active and progressive Y’s in the United States with programs for toddlers through seniors.

The motto and dedication of her veterinary practice is: “For people whose pets are part of the family.”

And she means it.

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Ever since she established the practice in 1992, Drake was determined to provide more than the usual care for pets.

“For me, my pets are like family members,” Drake said. “I want the best for them. So that’s how I practice and that’s how those who are on my staff wind up here and how we do things here,” she said.

We interviewed Drake on a busy afternoon in the examination room of her veterinary facility on North El Camino Real in Encinitas.

Drake has been a member of the Y for about 20 years — 17 years as a board member — and loves exercising, either at the Y or playing tennis, beach volleyball, mountain biking, hiking, and snow skiing.

What she finds so special about the Y, she said, is its focus on families, children and the whole community. “We build strong communities, strong families and strong kids.”

The Y’s campus occupies 20 acres of Encinitas oceanfront property with an additional 22,000 square-foot gymnastics center in Carlsbad. It features an aquatics center with two indoor pools, a world-renowned 32,000 sq. ft. skateboard park for youth and teens, ball fields, a preschool, day camps for children, counselor training, and more than 140 fitness classes for adults.

The Y’s charitable giving program reaches out beyond its membership to provide scholarships for 3,000 low-income youth, families and seniors.

And it partners with community programs that support families of neglect, domestic violence, children with special needs, children raised by caregivers, military families, and youth in need of training and education.

Drake was born in St. Louis, Missouri. Her father was a house builder.

“As soon as I could talk, I knew I wanted to be a vet,” she recalled. “I like people too,” she added.

But as a child, she repeatedly brought home stray animals and cared for them in her family’s basement. And as she grew older, she immersed herself in the “All Creatures Great and Small” semi-autobiographical books by British veterinary surgeon James Herriot.

“I just love animals. They make me smile. I love coming to work every day.”

After she had completed her undergraduate studies and earned her veterinary degree at the University of Missouri in 1989, “I packed up my car and moved to California,” initially to Los Angeles for a few years where she met her future husband while playing beach volleyball.

“He stopped and turned around and introduced himself to me. And it was just so nice to meet someone with good manners. I decided that he was the one I was going to marry. You know people in Southern California are pretty casual about manners and I could tell he was a good man. And I was right.”

Her husband, Dwight Fromm, is an engineer with Qualcomm. They’ve been married now for almost 16 years and have two sons, Christopher, 12, and Matthew, 9.

Coming from a long line of entrepreneurs in St. Louis, in California, Drake soon focused on establishing her own veterinary practice in the North County beach community of Encinitas and to raise a family there.

She opened a small veterinary hospital on Westlake Street in 1992, which she subsequently merged into another practice, creating her current 3,000-square-foot facility on North El Camino Real in 1998.

Her veterinary care center, with its staff of 30 employees, including six veterinarians, offers an extensive range of medical and preventive services, including surgery, acupuncture, dentistry, on-site laboratory services, behavioral pet training, bathing, boarding, prescription medications, and diet and nutrition education.

“It’s really important to listen and try to figure out how we can help both the person and their pet in a situation,” she said.

On her website,

[www.thedrakecenter.com](http://www.thedrakecenter.com)

, she also offers free video tutorials on pet care.

For children, ages 5 to 12, once a month, she opens the center to children, dressing them up like veterinary surgeons and giving them a behind-the-scene tour of the center.

“And we constantly have interns coming here to learn,” she said.

Her career advice to young people: “The most important thing is to find something you love to do. That’s what I tell my boys all the time...And you just need enough money to pay your bills. I can’t imagine going to work and not loving my work.

After 20 years of living in coastal Encinitas, Drake and her family moved this summer to the warmer and drier inland climate of Rancho Santa Fe.

## **Quick Facts**

### **Name:**

Michele Drake, D.V.M.

### **Distinction:**

Veterinarian Michele Drake is the recently elected chair of the Magdalena Ecke Family YMCA in Encinitas. She has been a Y member for 20 years.

### **Born:**

St. Louis, Missouri

### **Resident of:**

Rancho Santa Fe, formerly of Encinitas

### **Education:**

Bachelor's degree, University of Missouri, 1985; and Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M.), University of Missouri, 1989.

### **Family:**

She and her husband, Dwight Fromm, a Qualcomm engineer, have been married almost 16 years. They have two sons, Christopher, 12, and Matthew, 9.

### **Pets:**

Two cats, Max and Ruby; and two dogs, Lyle, a Standard Poodle, named after singer/songwriter Lyle Lovett, and Wilbur, a Jack Russell mix, named after Wilbur the piglet, of Charlott's Web fame.

### **Interests:**

Playing tennis, and with her family, skiing, hiking, mountain biking and playing beach volleyball.

### **Reading:**

Lately been reading non-fiction war books: "Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience and Redemption," by Laura Hillenbrand; "Fly Boys," by James Bradley, and The Good Soldiers, by David Finkel

Favorite getaway: Mammoth Mountain

**Favorite TV:**

“The Good Wife”

**Favorite film:**

“Anything Clint Eastwood does.”

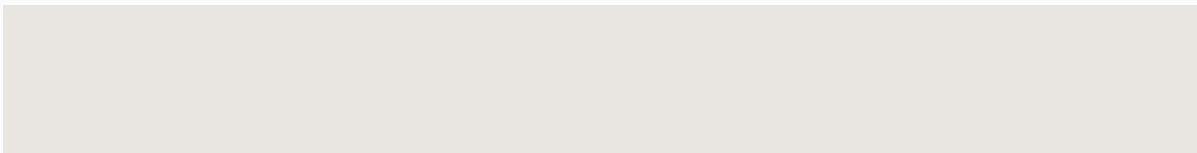
**Philosophy:**

“Like a shark, always swimming ahead, and learning something new thing, trying something new, meeting someone new.”



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