

Date: **March 8, 2012**  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Media Contact: **Madeleine Reberkenny**  
**703-752-9100**  
[Madeleine.reberkenny@southpaws.com](mailto:Madeleine.reberkenny@southpaws.com)

## **THOUSANDS OF SERVICE DOGS TO RECEIVE FREE SIGHT SAVING EYE EXAMS THROUGHOUT THE U.S. AND CANADA**

**The 5th Annual ACVO®/Merial® National Service Dog Eye Exam Event brings together veterinary ophthalmologists and thousands of service animals for free eye exams. Registration begins April 1st for May 2012 event.**

Fairfax, VA -- Guide dogs, handicapped assistance dogs, detection dogs and search and rescue dogs selflessly serve the public. **So, for the month of May 2012, Dr. Nancy Bromberg, VCA/SouthPaws Ophthalmology, in partnership with the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists (ACVO) is launching the 5<sup>th</sup> annual ACVO/Merial National Service Dog Eye Exam Event** to help serve these dogs and other service animals who dedicate their lives to serving the public. More than 200 board certified veterinary ophthalmologists throughout the U.S. , as well as Canada and Puerto Rico , are estimated to provide free sight-saving eye exams to thousands of eligible service animals. Registration for service animal owners and handlers begins April 1, 2012 at [www.ACVOeyeexam.org](http://www.ACVOeyeexam.org)

Since the program launched in 2008, more than 10,500 service animals have been examined. In addition to dogs, other service animals including horses and even a service donkey named Henry (pictured below) received free sight saving exams. Henry is a therapy donkey who travels thousands of miles with Young's Funny Farm (a home for therapy animals) to visit hospitals, nursing homes, rehabilitation centers and special needs facilities to help bring a smile to patients. A few months prior to the 2011 event, his owner discovered he had an eye injury which ultimately stole his sight in one eye. His free eye exam in May 2011 was to ensure that his other eye is working just fine and he will be able to continue his mission of helping others.

### **WHAT VETERINARY OPHTHALMOLOGISTS LOOK FOR DURING THE EXAM:**

During the complete ocular exam, the veterinary specialists look for problems including: redness, squinting, cloudy corneas, retinal disease, early cataracts and other serious abnormalities. Early detection and treatment are vital to these working animals. "Our hope is that by checking their vision, we will be able to help a large number of service animals better assist their human friends," says Stacey Daniel, Executive Director of the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists.

A sampling of groups served since the ACVO/Merial National Service Dog Eye Exam Event launched in 2008 include: Transportation Security Agency (TSA) and military working dogs from Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, Puppies Behind Bars, an organization providing psychiatric service dogs to soldiers coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan, local fire, rescue and police

agencies, and also individual service dog owners and handlers who rely on these amazing animals daily.

### **HOW TO REGISTER FOR THE 2012 EVENT:**

To qualify, animals must be “active working animals” that were certified by a formal training program or organization or currently enrolled in a formal training program. The certifying organization could be national, regional or local in nature. **Owners/agents for the animal(s) must FIRST register the animal via an online registration form beginning April 1, 2012 at [www.ACVOeyeexam.org](http://www.ACVOeyeexam.org) Registration ends April 30th.** Once registered online, the owner/agent will receive a registration number and will be allowed access to a list of participating ophthalmologists in their area and may contact a specialist to schedule an appointment. At VCA/SouthPaws Ophthalmology or Hartwood Animal Hospital, appointments will take place during the month of May

### **About the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists**

The American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists® is an approved veterinary specialty organization of the American Board of Veterinary Specialties, and is recognized by the American Veterinary Medical Association. Its mission is “to advance the quality of veterinary medicine through certification of veterinarians who demonstrate excellence as specialists in veterinary ophthalmology.” To become board certified, a candidate must complete a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree, a one year internship, a three year approved residency and pass a series of credentials and examinations.

Sponsors of the ACVO/Merial National Service Dog Eye Exam Event include: Merial, Ocu-Glo Rx Canine Vision Supplement, Welch Allyn, Aventix Animal Health and Eye Care for Animals as well as many non-profit supporters including the American Veterinary Medical Association, most state veterinary medical associations in the U.S. and Canada, American Society of Veterinary Medical Association Executives, and other national service animal organizations.

### **About Merial**

Merial is a world-leading, innovation-driven animal health company, providing a comprehensive range of products to enhance the health, well-being and performance of a wide range of animals. Merial employs approximately 5,600 people and operates in more than 150 countries worldwide. Its 2010 sales were more than \$2.6 billion. Merial is the animal health division of sanofi-aventis. For more information, please see [www.merial.com](http://www.merial.com)

### **Media Inquiries:**

For more information, photos and interviews contact Madeleine Reberkenny at VCA/SouthPaws 703-752-9100, or Stacey Daniel, Executive Director of the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists To speak with a participating veterinary ophthalmologist, or service dog handler, please contact Sharyn Frankel at 508-561-9357 [Sharyn@Fetchingcommunications.co](mailto:Sharyn@Fetchingcommunications.co)