

NEIGHBORS

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Pet clinic dries out, opens up after storm

By **STEVE PETERSEN**
Herald Writer

Veterinarian John Kittrell isn't used to being caged up.

But during Hurricane Andrew, he and an assistant stayed in cages with the 82 animals they were boarding as the roof at the Dixie Animal Clinic fell in around them. All the animals and the vets escaped injury — but all needed a good drying.

The hospital, 14701 S. Dixie Highway, was closed for four months and reopened several weeks ago in a 24-foot by 60-foot trailer on the site. The office was previously used by a vet on the west coast.

Carmen Pucko, one of the hospital's long-time clients, said she is relieved the hospital is back in business.

"It throws you off completely," said Pucko. "I've been coming here about 25 years. It's good to come back to someone you're used to."

Tom Rainey started the hospital in 1965 and has been treating

furry patients ever since. Rainey, who grew up on a farm in Georgia, graduated from the University of Georgia. There he met Kittrell, who would join him in 1971 as the second vet at Dixie Animal Hospital. Together, they have seen generations of patients.

"The older I get, I'm seeing the children of my original clients bringing their animals in," Rainey said.

In the trailer, Rainey and Kittrell installed new equipment to replace what was ruined in the storm and have a lab, surgery, X-ray, kennel, two examination rooms and an office and reception area. The only thing they don't have room for is boarding animals.

Rainey hopes they will be back in the old building within six months. Despite the loss of 13 employees since the hurricane, Rainey and Kittrell are trying to keep business as usual.

Homer Lyon, a veterinary assistant for 10 years, spent the



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BACK IN BUSINESS: Tom Rainey examines Helen Smith's poodle Brandy. Smith has been coming to the vet since 1989.

night of the hurricane in the cages with Kittrell and the animals.

"I kept watching the ceiling throbbing," said Lyon. "I wasn't

scared because it was outside any experience and I'd never seen a bad hurricane before."

Kittrell said the noise bothered him most of all.

"It was ungodly," he said. "There was so much noise I couldn't hear the animals, I think they were quiet. I know my dog was very quiet."