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March 6, 2014 | By Rebeca Piccardo, Sun Sentinel

Three weeks after a Parkland man jumped into his pool to extinguish the flames that burned him and his dog, he is taking his pet home to finish their recovery together.

Jesus "Jess" Olivas, 48, picked up Ruby, his 8-year-old soft-coated wheaten terrier, from a Margate veterinary clinic Thursday afternoon.



Jess Olivas of Parkland gives a welcome hug to his pet Ruby at Dr. Peter's... (Rebeca Piccardo, Sun Sentinel)

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Ruby

Ruby had suffered burns to more than 50 percent of her body when she accidentally caught fire Feb. 11. Olivas and his wife treated the dog with a flammable insecticide and then lit a barbecue starter to kill the bugs that leapt off the dog. The dog ignited when it got too close to the flame.

Her owner said he took a leap of faith by grabbing Ruby and jumping into the water to put out the blaze.

"She was just a ball of fire," Olivas said.

Although owner and dog still have some recovery ahead of them, Olivas and his family said they are grateful to the clinic's veterinarian, Peter Krolikowski, and his staff for taking in Ruby without charging them for care.

"Without them, Ruby would be dead by now," Olivas said.

Had the dog not had long fur, her burns would have been more severe, veterinary technician Justin Harris said.

"She sustained most of the burns in her lower abdomen," said Harris. "As of right now, there was no need for any surgical procedure."

Olivas had been hospitalized at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami following the accident. To the surprise of the doctors treating him, Olivas did not need skin grafts to mend the second- and third-degree burns on his forearms, face and neck, Olivas said.

"The doctors were perplexed," he said. "Two weeks after they removed my bandages, my skin had started to grow."

On Thursday, after Olivas' therapy session at St. Mary's Medical Center, he went to pick up Ruby from the veterinary clinic.

Ruby, who was taking a lot of pain medication for weeks, went home with an antibiotics prescription and ointment to finish healing. Still, Olivas has to take her for a checkup every three to five days.

The night of Ruby's accident, when Olivas was taken to a hospital, his wife, Telma Botcherby, stayed behind with Ruby. She said she worried that she could not afford to take the dog to be treated at an animal clinic.

While Olivas and his wife were receiving expensive quotes from other animal clinics in the area, the veterinary technician, Harris, said he heard about Ruby from fire-rescue personnel.

Harris notified Krolikowski about the incident, and the clinic decided to take in the dog without charging the family, he said.

In addition to caring for Ruby while she was in critical condition, Krolikowski is following through with Ruby's recovery without charging the family for the next few weeks or months, Harris said.

"This really tells you something about the animal hospitals," Olivas said. "They are either there to make a buck or they really care about the animal."

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