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UF's Aquatic Animal Health program thrives, but hopes to survive

BY SARAH CAREY

The University of Florida's Aquatic Animal Health program was significantly enhanced in 2000 with an \$810,000 state grant shared with the Whitney Laboratory for Marine Bioscience in St. Augustine. This funding is part of a larger state program that supports the rescue and rehabilitation of Florida's imperiled manatee population at Sea World Orlando, Miami Seaquarium and Lowry Park Zoo.

The funding allowed UF to establish a unique training program in marine mammal health that complemented existing programs in fisheries and aquaculture.

"We have been able to provide support to our colleagues in various state agencies and to unify previously disparate programs within other departments and colleges," said Dr. Ruth Francis-Floyd, the program's director.

Dr. Eleanor Green, chair of the UF College of Veterinary Medicine's department of large animal clinical sciences and chief of staff of UF's large animal hospital, called the program "one of the most exciting on campus" and said it adds an important dimension to her department, which is where the program has its academic home.

"This program is important to the State of Florida, its fragile ecosystem, and its people," Green said. "It would be impossible to measure the positive return on the state's investment due to the expansiveness of its impact, such as on its multitude of freshwater lakes, miles of coastline, unique and endangered aquatic animal species, agribusiness, tourism and much more."

The program covers everything from shellfish and other invertebrates, typically clams, shrimp and ornamental coral, to fish, including both aquarium-type fish and aquaculture (fish farming) operations, added Dr. Charles Courtney, associate dean of research and graduate studies at the veterinary college, in which the universitywide program is centered. "Our zoo medicine faculty and graduate students are heavily involved in sea turtles and alligators, so we're also doing the large reptiles, both clinically and in research."

Collaborations with state and federal agencies, as well as private zoological parks such as the Clearwater Marine Aquarium, Sea World and Disney's Animal Kingdom, have been strengthened through UF's veterinary and scientific expertise in private collections and wildlife rehabilitation. The first-ever clinical resident at UF specializing in aquatic animal medicine finished her program in July. In August, veterinary college faculty approved a certificate program for professional DVM students who wish to gain experience in the area of aquatic animal health.

The program also helps fund research ranging from very basic science to applied questions, such as how fast a boat has to be going before it will damage a manatee on impact — information which could provide information used to set boat speeds, Courtney said. Continuing education and consultation is available to biologists, veterinarians, and wildlife rehabilitation professionals throughout the country and internationally.

But the recurring funds that have made the AAH program possible may soon be on the chopping block, vulnerable to budget cuts at a time when all state agencies have been asked to trim their budgets from 4-10 percent due to Florida's sagging economy.

"While supplemented by many more grants and contracts we bring in ourselves, the state grant has allowed the college to build a stable and strong marine mammal program and strengthen longtime programs in fisheries and aquaculture," Courtney said. "The funds we receive are leveraged many times over."

In August, Dr. Mike Walsh, formerly head veterinarian at Sea World of Florida, joined the UF team as associate program director. His 21 years in marine animal medicine have been hallmarked by innovation and improvement in the care of manatees, pinnipeds, penguins, dolphins, whales, sea turtles, sharks, beached whales and dolphins.

"I joined this program because of its past strengths, its current level of expertise and the obvious future commitment it will make to Florida's valuable wild aquatic animal species, the fish industry, the Oceanaria, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the National Marine Fisheries," Walsh said. "These are unique and productive partnerships and the general public has no idea of the many accomplishments on their behalf."

Walsh also has contributed to the internationalization of Florida's aquatic animal medicine program with previous training for and assistance to programs in Taiwan, Canada, Holland, Argentina, and South America.

"There may be programs around the world that are stronger than we are in one particular area, but I'm fairly certain that no one has the broad strength and completeness that we have," Courtney said.



Dr. Mike Walsh, UF's new associate director of the Aquatic Animal Health Program, helps position a rehabilitated stranded dolphin for chest radiographs at Clearwater Marine Science Center. Taking the radiographs (not shown in photo) was Dr. Michael Porter, who directs the College of Veterinary Medicine's Mobile Equine Diagnostic Service. Porter took the MEDS truck to Clearwater to be of service when assistance was needed. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Mike Walsh)

Marine mammal health expert named associate director of Aquatic Animal Health program

BY SARAH CAREY

The story of Winter, a dolphin outfitted with a prosthetic fin by a team of volunteer experts working for Clearwater Marine Aquarium, has made national news recently, in part because of the unique collaborations and helping spirit that made the new prosthetic possible.

One of those experts, Dr. Mike Walsh, joined the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine's faculty in August as associate program director for the Aquatic Animal Health Program.

A former head veterinarian at Sea World, Walsh has spent more than 21 years working in marine mammal medicine and helping to improve the care of manatees, seals and sea lions, penguins, dolphins, whales, sea turtles and sharks, as well as beached whales and dolphins. He also has longtime UF ties, having completed his residency in zoological medicine at the college in 1983.

In his new role, Walsh's duties will be divided among clinical, teaching and research responsibilities. He will continue his clinical work at Clearwater Aquarium, where he provides contracted veterinary services and visits every two weeks, now accompanied by veterinary students and the new aquatic animal health resident, Dr. Jenny Meegan.

"We also are involved in providing medical support for manatee captures and will probably become more involved with dolphin health assessments in the future," Walsh said.

He will assist with the newest aquatic animal health courses outside the veterinary curriculum, namely Sea Vet 1 and Sea Vet 2, held for the first time last summer.

"These courses are geared to educating various people interested in marine animal medicine, primarily veterinary students and veterinarians," Walsh explained, adding that the second Sea Vet course emphasizes more in-depth relationships in selected species. Both courses provide not only lecture material regarding various aquatic species but also wet labs and interactions with people currently working in the field.

He also will seek to strengthen UF collaborations with parks such as the Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta, Sea World in Orlando, Lowry Park in Tampa, the Miami Seaquarium, Mote Marine Laboratory in Sarasota and other organizations.

"The theme parks, Oceanaria and zoos have provided vital support both to our student externship program and to our clinical residency program," Walsh said.

Walsh has long collaborated with Florida's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the National Marine Fisheries Service and Disney's Epcot Center. He hopes to beef up those relationships in his new position and to help fulfill the mandate UF's CVM currently has to meet state funding requirements, primarily through work with the Florida manatee as well as other marine mammals such as those which strand on the beach.

Even when he worked at Sea World, Walsh lectured regularly to freshman veterinary students.

"Corporate medicine, like any area, can be very challenging and if you're prepared, you'll do much better in the long run," Walsh said. "Most veterinarians who enter that field aren't prepared for client interaction, since typically the animals all were managed by other organized groups such as curators. Historically, veterinarians are a new addition to that animal management scheme."

Walsh hopes to further discussion with the National Marine Fisheries service about ways in which UF might better assist with issues relating to the Right whale.

"We are currently involved in ongoing research to find suitable methods to sedate these whales in the wild and aid them in disentanglement from fishing lines and nets," Walsh said.

One of Walsh's research studies involves tagging large marine animals such as manatees with special tags capable of providing information about the animal's swimming angle, its pitch and roll and even noise that is surrounding them.

"This is a cooperative project between people that understand manatee medicine and the state, which wants to do the best job possible in carrying out their important research programs," Walsh said, adding that both groups recognize the unique partnerships that can benefit this species.

"It is probably the most synergistic, complementary program I have been involved with, maximizing the knowledge base of state and federal biologists with the medical knowledge of manatee clinicians," Walsh said.

Walsh's expertise in marine mammal medicine will supplement existing strengths UF's Aquatic Animal Health program offers in aquaculture and fisheries.



Dr. Mike Walsh



Senior UF veterinary student Justin Sobota stands with U.S. Senator Bill Nelson, D-Florida, in the Capitol building near the Senate chamber this past summer in Washington, D.C. (Photo courtesy of Justin Sobota)

Veterinary student hopes national leadership role will advance "One Health" goals in profession

BY SARAH CAREY

University of Florida senior veterinary student Justin Sobota describes himself as "an average guy." His manner — whether greeting colleagues, kidding around with fellow students, or checking in with his professors — is unquestionably humble.

However, Sobota's resume, accomplishments and vision as the president of the national Student American Veterinary Medical Association make it clear the Pennsylvania native's life and leadership contributions are anything but ordinary.

"I somewhat take the cowboy philosophy of not telling everyone who I really am," Sobota said. "I've always been interested in politics and policy in veterinary medicine."

In high school, Sobota was president of student government; in college, he presided over Pennsylvania State University's academic assembly, an experience which helped solidify his desire to pursue veterinary medicine as a career. He also served as president of the pre-veterinary club at Penn State, where he received his bachelor's degree in animal bioscience. In addition, Sobota holds master's degrees in both animal science and management and even worked as an equine nutrition consultant for two companies prior to returning to UF as a veterinary student.

"When I came back to school, I didn't feel I was providing society very much, which is one reason I wanted to become so involved in SAVMA," Sobota said. "Just going through vet school wasn't fulfilling. I have become much more goal oriented in many respects, and really wanted to be a part of the student AVMA and be a delegate and be a part of organized veterinary medicine."

SAVMA is an 11,000 member organization which encompasses students from all over the United States, Canada, the Caribbean, Europe, Ireland and Australia. Sobota became the group's president in March and will serve for one year. As president-elect, he served on numerous committees within the group and thought a lot about what he hoped to accomplish as SAVMA's most visible officer.

"I and other executive committee members wanted to do something on a global scale," Sobota said. "We teamed up with the Centers for Disease Control and the Alliance for Rabies control to promote World Rabies Day on Sept. 8.

"This opportunity enabled us to develop our SAVMA One Health Challenge Series, which is intended to drive home the message that the many components of the health profession — veterinary and human medicine, public health, veterinary technicians and nurses — are all part of one goal to improve health for everyone. All of these groups need to work together," he added.

As it happens, SAVMA's goal is concurrent with the American Veterinary Medical Association's "One Health" initiative, which promotes essentially the same message: that the vision of one health will enhance the integration of animal, human and environmental health for the benefit of all.

"We are two separate organizations (AVMA and SAVMA) but we are somewhat teaming with the AVMA on this approach," Sobota said, adding that SAVMA already has reached out to

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medical students to enlist their support for the one health, one medicine concept.

While only 28 veterinary schools belong to SAVMA, many more medical and veterinary technical schools may soon become involved in the effort to expand public awareness about the importance of education about zoonotic diseases.

As SAVMA's president, Sobota was named to the AVMA's One Health Initiative Task Force in July. Sobota, the only veterinary student on the task force, will join 12 other members who will work to identify areas where animal and human medicine are already integrated and where integration is needed. The group also hopes to identify challenges or potential barriers to integration and to identify potential ways of overcoming those challenges.

Other goals SAVMA has put forth this year include encouraging veterinary students to contact their legislative representatives about legislative initiatives impacting the veterinary profession, and doing a better job of outreach — specifically getting the word out to fellow students about the availability of SAVMA scholarships and providing “better public relations” to a variety of audiences about what veterinarians do.

“Our communications committee this year created a public relations DVD for pre-vet students as well as veterinary students, and copies have been delivered to all the schools,” Sobota said. “We need to do a better job of promoting our profession, even amongst ourselves.”

This past summer, Sobota worked for four weeks on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., as part of the AVMA's governmental relations division. The program provides a small group of veterinary students with the opportunity to participate in the legislative process as a way of promoting veterinary issues.

“I'm really thankful that my advisors and professors are supporting me by providing some flexibility in my schedule,” Sobota said. “Without that, it would be extremely difficult to do all of these outside activities.”

Large animal clinical sciences chair Eleanor Green, also chief of staff of UF's Alec P. and Louise H. Courtelis Equine Hospital, called Sobota “clearly a leader among his student peers.” As Sobota's faculty advisor and mentor, Green said she had interacted with him beyond the formal classroom setting, discussing future goals and aspirations and even philosophies of life.

“Justin is precocious in his global view of the profession, with a mature approach to his own professional aspirations and how they integrate with the profession on a larger scale,” Green said. “His desire to contribute to the profession and to participate in organized veterinary medicine is sincere. He brings to the table experience with research, teaching, the animal industries, and veterinary technicians.”

Green added that Sobota had “an uncanny sense” of how to balance his professional and personal life.

“He has attained a level of comfort with the related choices he makes,” she said. “While he is a role model in the leadership arena, this balance he seeks and finds is also exemplary.”

Sobota encouraged all of his fellow students to participate in something bigger than themselves, whether a club, their state veterinary organization, or a specialist group.

“Life is more about how you accomplish something than what you've accomplished,” Sobota said. “It's what you can provide, not the letters behind your name, that defines who you are.”

UF pharmacology professor named interim associate dean at veterinary college

Thomas W. Vickroy, Ph.D., a pharmacology professor and longtime University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine faculty member, has been named interim associate dean for students and instruction at the college.

Vickroy's appointment came after a national search to fill the position was terminated in August due to a universitywide hiring freeze.

A neuropharmacology professor in the college's department of physiological sciences, Vickroy teaches veterinary pharmacology and small and large animal clinical pharmacology to professional (D.V.M.) students. He also lectures on cellular neurophysiology, molecular and cellular neurobiology, mammalian pharmacology and advanced toxicology, among other topics, to graduate students associated both with the veterinary college and with UF's College of Medicine.

Vickroy has won numerous awards for teaching excellence since he joined the UF veterinary faculty in 1988, among them the National Award for Excellence in College and University Distance Education, given in 2006 by the forensic science program. That program is offered through the graduate schools of both the veterinary college and UF's College of Pharmacy. Other honors include being named by veterinary students as their Clinical Sciences Teacher of the Year in 2003-2004 and also as the Class of 1996's Teacher of the Year.

Vickroy's appointment was effective Sept. 1. His predecessor in the position, James P. Thompson, D.V.M., Ph.D., had served since 1996. Soon after the present dean, Glen Hoffsis, D.V.M., was hired, Thompson was promoted to executive associate dean. Since that time, he has performed duties associated with both positions.

“I would like to thank Dr. Thompson for his intense commitment to the college during this period of transition and I understand the importance of the associate dean position to the college and our programs,” Hoffsis said. “Although I wish the search process could have gone forward with full faculty, staff, and student involvement, I have full confidence in Dr. Vickroy and his ability to perform the responsibilities associated with this job.”



Dr. Tom Vickroy

Ophthalmology professor honored for presentations at conference



Dennis E. Brooks, D.V.M., Ph.D., a professor of ophthalmology at the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine, has been honored for his presentations during the 2007 Western Veterinary Conference, held February in Las Vegas.

Conference attendees named Brooks a Continuing Educator of the Year in the category of equine medicine and surgery. Vision problems are the fourth most common health problem for horses, and dogs are second only to humans in incidence of glaucoma. Brooks has not only personally saved sight for many animals, his research has changed the standard of care other veterinarians provide for equine eye problems.

At UF, Brooks and his colleagues have performed more corneal transplants in horses than anyone in the world.

UF physical plant employee shares gratitude

Bill Privett, senior refrigeration mechanic with the UF Physical Plant Department) would like to sincerely thank everyone from the CVM family for their donations of furniture, cash and well wishes in the aftermath of the fire which destroyed his family's mobile home on Aug. 13.

“It was a devastating experience but once I found out how many people actually cared, I was overwhelmed by it,” Privett said. “I kind of learned a life lesson that when the chips are down, people sure do chip in. When you walk into my house everything there has been donated. It's a lasting memory that I'll never forget.”

Privett said there were “a hundred or more” names of people he would like to have included in this article to give thanks to and one day he'll get around to thanking everyone individually for their support.

In the meantime, Privett and his wife, Karen, are looking forward not backwards and focusing on the future.

“We are in a new place and it's coming along pretty good,” Privett said.



Bill and Karen Privett

Freshman leadership experience gets added boost from sophomore participation

This year's 88 new freshman veterinary students may get by with a little help from their friends -- the sophomores.

During the Florida Orientation Leadership Experience, held Aug. 15-16 at Camp Weed in Live Oak, Fla., 12 sophomore students participated as facilitators, guiding training sessions and activities.

"We met with these facilitators at four different, three-hour planning and training sessions where we went over the agenda and all the activities," said Kristi Esmiol, academic coordinator for the college's Office for Students and Instruction. "We trained them. There were large and small group presentations and this year's program was leaps and bounds above last year's, mainly because we had a team doing it this year."

The team consisted of staff members from the Office for Students and Instruction, specifically including Esmiol, Tonie Henry, Dot McColskey, Lynnette Chaparro and Erin Sanetz as well as Dr. Jim Thompson, former associate dean for students and instruction and Dr. Tom Vickroy, the new interim associate dean, as well as the 12 sophomore students.

Overall, the program consisted of activities focused on getting to know yourself better through the Myers-Briggs test, looking at how individual personalities work within a team; how to encourage self expression in a safe environment while understanding and implementing both individual and team goals; how to identify and cultivate positive coping skills in personal and professional life; and ultimately how to better build trust and unity within a team.

"The whole program built up to the last afternoon on the second day when we did trust-related activities, which were led by our sophomore facilitators," Esmiol said. "One facilitator said the web of trust was so meaningful when they sat down as a small group and discussed what they'd learned, where they were going and what people's fears were about vet school. Some people said they could not believe what was shared and how personal and open these students were being."

Hill's Pet Nutrition was the principal sponsor. Other sponsors included Banfield, Pfizer, SCAVMA, AVMA/ Group Health and Life Insurance Trust Programs, Fort Dodge and the FVMA.

What they said:

The Freshmen

"My FOLE experience can be summed up in one simple sentence. It was one of the best ways to get to know the people that I will be spending the next four years of my life with, and the relationships that I continue to develop with my fellow classmates will last a lifetime."

-- Michael Raposo

"I loved my FOLE experience! Not only was the location beautiful, but it was so great to meet my new classmates in a non-threatening, peaceful environment. The workshops and small group exercises were fun and educational. I made friendships that will last throughout vet school. I also learned a great deal about myself, my personality type and how I interact with others. This will be an invaluable tool for future dealings with clients and peers."

--Ruth West

The Sophomores

"I felt that FOLE was a great opportunity to not only get to know the incoming freshmen, but also instill in them the values and principles that are going to help them in the next year, and hopefully beyond. It was nice to be able to share our experiences and help them more easily acclimate to their new surroundings. I loved meeting them, and wish them only the best of luck!"

-- Joanie DeHaven

"As facilitators we put in a lot of work and it was rewarding to see our hard work in action. I think the best part of FOLE didn't actually happen at Camp Weed but happens everyday when I walk through the VAB and see the freshmen and sophomores talking and joking around. They ask how our exams/classes are going and we ask them how they are adjusting to vet school life. By playing a part in FOLE, the sophomores showed that they truly care about the freshmen and it has brought about a great sense of camaraderie between the classes. There isn't a division anymore between classes, we being the older and more mature, while they are the younger, inexperienced. Instead we are colleagues here to help each other through this rigorous program and become successful veterinarians."

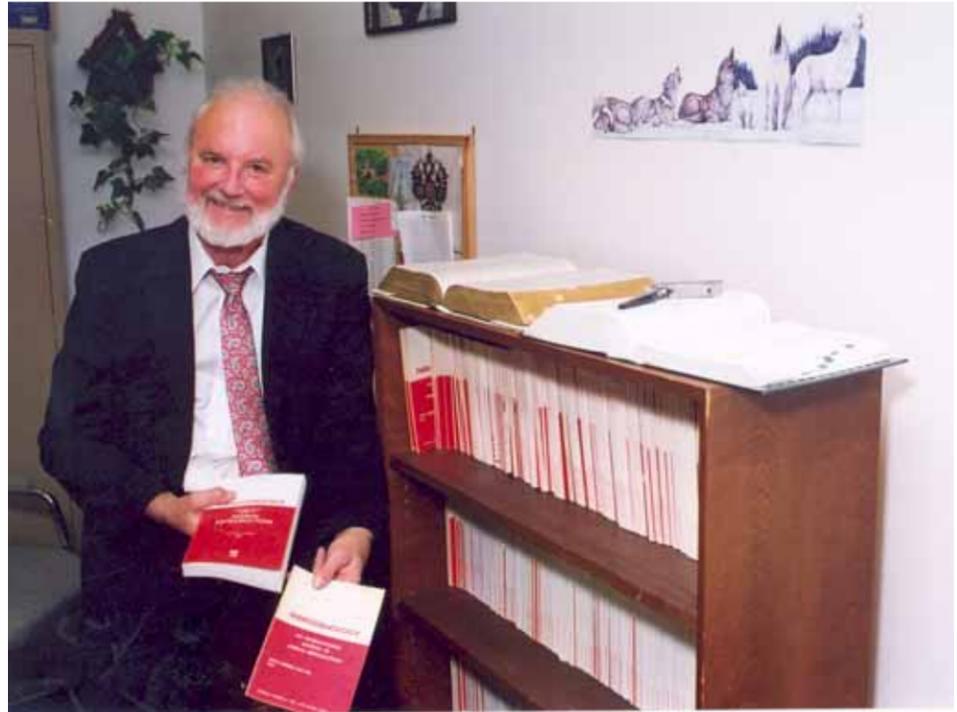
-- Charli Jane Walrond

"The experience of being a facilitator at FOLE was an honor, in that we were able to watch firsthand the freshmen beginning their training as a professional. Stepping out of my personal comfort zone to take part in the initial interactions of freshmen in challenging situations further helped me to grow in my own leadership abilities."

-- Katherine Doerr

"Being a facilitator was an invaluable experience. We had a chance to not only grow as leaders, but to also bond with the freshman class."

-- Melanie Thomas



Dr. Victor Shille is pictured in his former office in the Veterinary Academic Building, where he edited the *Theriogenology* journal for ten years following his retirement from the college faculty. He served as the journal's editor for a total of 25 years.

Dr. Victor Shille, editor, friend and pioneer in small animal reproduction field, dies at 74

The college and the world of theriogenology lost a friend when Dr. Victor Shille died Sept. 9 at the age of 74. His family lost a devoted husband and father.

Although Shille had technically retired from the UF College of Veterinary Medicine in 1993 — he had served as a professor of small animal theriogenology at UF since 1978 — he remained involved in college life and events.

He kept in close touch with Dr. Maarten Drost, a longtime friend and UF CVM colleague, and others with the Food Animal Reproduction and Medicine Service. He attended the dedication of Deriso Hall in 2006 and most recently, a meeting held by Dean Glen Hoffsis for professors emeriti of the college.

Many consider Shille the grandfather of the study of small animal reproduction.

Born in Yugoslavia to Russian parents, Shille spent his youth in Germany and grew up in Southern California, where his parents immigrated during World War II. He was fluent in Russian, German and English; could read Serbo-Croatian and could speak conversational Swedish and Spanish.

Shille received his D.V.M. from the University of California/Davis and then spent 14 years in a solo small animal practice prior to pursuing his Ph.D. His doctoral work focused on follicular development and ovulation in cats. He increased his international perspective by completing a postdoctoral program at the Swedish Agricultural College in Uppsala.

When he joined the UF veterinary college as a member of the founding faculty, he worked under the first dean, the late Dr. Charles Cornelius.

Shille had a prestigious career in academia, where he was widely acknowledged for his abilities in and devotion to teaching. He was UF's Norden Distinguished Professor in 1988 and was Teacher of the Year in 1991. He received the Bartlett Award from the American College of Theriogenologists in 1992 and was the recipient of the college alumni council's first-ever Distinguished Service Award in 2001.

Shille also served for nearly 25 years as chief editor of *Theriogenology*, an international journal of animal reproduction. Ten of those years were spent post-retirement, with Shille working quietly with his small staff of copy editors on the second floor of the Veterinary Academic Building.

Shille suffered from Parkinson's disease, which made his life and ability to use his considerable clinical skills increasingly difficult in recent years. In a farewell message printed in *Theriogenology*, he stated that he had retired twice from UF — the first time from clinical duties due to "Mr. Parkinson" because "trembling hands neither inspire confidence in a client nor do they make surgery possible." The second retirement was in 2003 from the journal because "Parkinsonism was advancing."

However, Shille never really retired, said his friend, Drost.

"He continued to help authors and graduate students who spoke languages other than English with their manuscripts," Drost said.

Over the past four years, Shille continued to present workshops of English for speakers of other languages with his wife, Patt. These workshops, focused on how to write a scientific paper, were presented contemporaneously with the annual conference of the International Embryo Transfer Society — which awarded him its Distinguished Service Award in 2006 — and were held in Quebec, Hungary, France, The Netherlands and China.

"Dr. Shille's philosophy was that language must not be a barrier to publication," Drost said. "The most difficult problem is not in grammar, punctuation or syntax, but in cultural differences in expression of ideas, he believed."

Cards may be sent to Patt Shille, 1807 NW 22nd Drive, Gainesville FL 32605.

As for memorial contributions, the Shille family, Patt and her sons Michael, Ted and Tom, suggest two options for donations, both of which can be accessed on-line.

1) National Parkinson Foundation. Go to: <http://www.parkinson.org> then select: Donate Today.

2) The Visual Guide to Feline Reproduction and the Visual Guide to Canine Reproduction which will be dedicated to Shille, and which will contain his collection of teaching slides. Go to: <http://drostproject.vetmed.ufl.edu> On the home page under Support the Project click on University of Florida Foundation.