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UF veterinary college receives largest-ever private gift: approximately \$6 million from South Florida cattle ranchers' family estates

BY SARAH CAREY

The University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine has received approximately \$6 million from the estates of two South Florida cattle ranch owners, Harriet Weeks and her daughter, Robin Weeks. The largest private gifts ever received by the college, the Weeks' estate gifts are eligible for matching funds from the state of Florida major gifts trust fund, which would result in a total impact of \$12 million.

The gifts will be used to create an endowed chair in veterinary medicine and an endowed professorship in bovine medicine, as well as an endowed fund to support teaching, research and programs at the college. UF veterinary administrators are excited about what the gifts mean to the college's future, particularly in the area of bovine health, which is facing critical shortages in veterinary medicine in both the public and private sectors. The bovine professorship may aid in attracting more students to this particular field, as well as enhance disease research in this area, administrators say.

"In this time of decreasing state budgetary support, endowments are critical," said the college's dean, Glen Hoffsis, D.V.M. "For our college to receive two endowed positions simultaneously is just extraordinary."

A previous installment of \$1 million from the Robin Weeks estate enabled the college to meet its \$4 million private funding goal and to obtain \$57 million in state funding for a new small animal hospital.

The most recent gifts consist of \$3.5 million from Robin Weeks' estate and \$950,000 from the estate of Harriet Weeks. An additional gift of approximately \$500,000 is expected when the estates are totally settled.

"Harriet and Robin Weeks were both school teachers and part-time ranchers until Robin's father and brother passed away," said accountant Robert Richardson, a trustee for the Weeks' estate. "Not wealthy people, the Weeks' sacrificed heavily to retain their land and to run a 300-head cattle ranch.

"Their family was not a typical one to make such a large bequest," he added. "Harriet and Robin made their decision because of their commitment to Florida agriculture and love of small animals, as well as their desire to help veterinary students through education and research."

Dr. Mike McNulty, a mixed-animal practitioner and a member of the college's class of '83, was Robin Weeks' veterinarian and friend for many years. McNulty worked with Weeks' four herds of Brangus cattle, advising her on health and production management.

"I'll never forget, a few years before she died, I was leaving her ranch late on a Saturday afternoon and I told her, 'I'm going to stop and get a lottery ticket.' She immediately replied, 'you've already won the lottery.'"

McNulty added, "I looked at her quizzically and she explained, 'with your education, you've already won the lottery.' She knew education was a sure ticket, if not to wealth and riches, at least to a better life. I've never forgotten that afternoon and appreciate it greatly every time I think about it."

Some time later, he shared with Weeks his intent to include the UF veterinary college in his own estate plans.

"I think that registered in her mind," he said, adding that a short time after Weeks became ill, she asked to meet with him at her home.

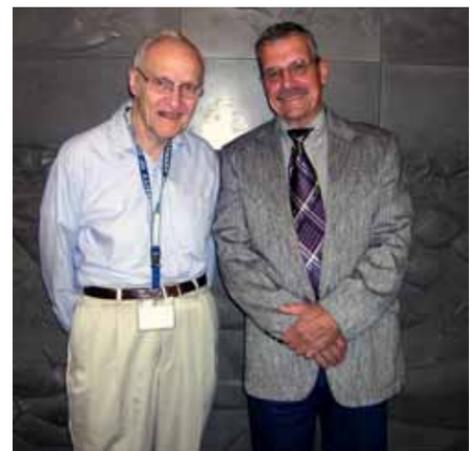
"She said she wanted me to give her some information about how to make a gift to the veterinary college," McNulty said. "I then put her in touch with the college's development office and her plans unfolded from that point."

Harriet Weeks died in February 2005 and Robin Weeks died shortly thereafter. The majority of their estate assets consisted of agricultural real estate in Glades County.

"I'm pleased that Dr. McNulty has remained so loyal to the college, and that he felt he received such a great veterinary education here," Hoffsis said. "He was able to use his education for his clients' benefit, and in doing so, helped the Weeks' create their legacy through these substantial gifts."



The late Harriet and Robin Weeks.
 (Photo courtesy of Robert Richardson)



Dr. Jim Himes, left, is shown with Dr. Mike McNulty, class of '83, during a 2006 visit to Gainesville.
 (Photo by Sarah Carey)

Veterinary ophthalmologist gives prestigious Smith Memorial Lecture at British equine group meeting

University of Florida veterinary ophthalmologist Dennis Brooks, D.V.M., Ph.D., presented the prestigious Sir Frederick Smith Memorial Lecture in Warwickshire, England kicking off the annual meeting of the British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA).

The lecture is named in honor of the late Sir Frederick Smith, a veterinarian who started the British Army Veterinary Corp for cavalry horses in the late 1800s. He served in the British Army in India and in South Africa. Smith was knighted and also became a Major General, and performed research into equine laminitis, and general horse health.

"He even did some ophthalmology of the horse," Brooks said.

A professor in small and large animal clinical sciences at UF's College of Veterinary Medicine, Brooks spoke to the British Equine Veterinary Association about the changing medical standards of care in horses with ophthalmic problems, and the use of antiproteases in treating infectious corneal ulcers in horses. He was seated next to Britain's Princess Anne during the BEVA's awards presentation, and received a medal for his selection as the Smith Memorial Lecturer.



Britain's Princess Anne greets UF's Dr. Dennis Brooks during the British Equine Veterinary Association's annual meeting in December. Brooks presented the Smith Memorial Lecture during the meeting.
 (Photo courtesy of Dr. Dennis Brooks)

Longtime CVM former faculty member, radiologist dies

BY SARAH CAREY

Dr. Norman Ackerman, a board-certified veterinary radiologist and former faculty member at the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine, has died.

Known by his peers and friends as a quiet and humble man as well as a great teacher, Ackerman, 65, was a member of UF's veterinary faculty from 1979 to 1994.

"Dr. Ackerman was one of our earliest faculty members and a stalwart leader of our radiology service," said Dr. Colin Burrows, who helped recruit Ackerman back to UF two years ago to serve as a locum in the veterinary college's radiology service.

"A new generation of students and clinicians were able to appreciate his skills," Burrows said. "He was a universally revered radiologist and the profession is poorer for his passing."

A 1966 graduate of Auburn University's School of Veterinary Medicine, Ackerman served for three years as base veterinarian for the United States Air Force in Japan and in Thailand. He completed his residency in radiology at the University of Missouri and later served as an assistant professor of radiology on the veterinary school faculties at the University of Missouri and the University of California, Davis prior to coming to UF.

He was a professor of veterinary radiology and had served as chief of the college's radiology service when he left UF in 1994. He subsequently practiced in Louisville, Ky. and in Huntsville, Ala.

"Dr. Ackerman was one of the reasons I went into veterinary radiology," said Dr. Clifford "Kip" Berry, a 1984 graduate of the UF veterinary college. "Just after my residency when I came back and taught at UF for a year, he prepared me for the oral board examination, which I passed, and protected me so that I could do the appropriate research for a tenure track position."

"He was great pillar in my life and was a fatherly figure to me," Berry added. "There is nothing that I can say that would ever truly express my appreciation for his help and what he did for me, or my admiration for him."

Ackerman became board certified as a Diplomate in the American College of Veterinary Radiology in 1974 and also was a member of the Radiological Society of North America, the American Veterinary Medical Association, Phi Zeta and the Association of Military Surgeons.

"Dr. Ackerman was a highly respected member of the ACVR," said Dr. Tod Drost, the group's current president and an associate professor at The Ohio State University's College of Veterinary Medicine. Drost is a 1991 graduate of the UF veterinary college.

"He was one of the pillars of ACVR and respected as a great diagnostic radiologist. Even after he left UF, he continued to work in the clinic there and elsewhere when needed. Anytime the clinic was short of people, he helped."

Drost said Ackerman had coauthored two editions of a textbook, "Small Animal Radiology and Ultrasonography," with Ron Burk.

"My colleagues and I never refer to the title of the book, we just always call it 'Burk and Ackerman,'" Drost said.

"People do say that, or they call it Ackerman and Burk, because 'A' is before 'B,'" said Crispin Spencer, D.V.M., a former UF veterinary college faculty member and board-certified veterinary radiologist who worked closely with Ackerman for many years while at UF.

Spencer said Ackerman's name "nearly always ended up first" on almost every list of any committee or group he ever belonged to, because of its spelling.

"There were not very many veterinary radiologists at all when Norm first became board certified in 1974," Spencer said. "At that time, he was one of the most revered radiologists in the country. Everybody knew of his skill and dedication to the profession. It was quite a feat to have him end up at Florida."

In 15 years they worked together at UF, Spencer said he and Ackerman grew together as clinicians, seeing many of the same cases.

"You work with someone every day, day in and day out, and go to professional meetings together, you almost start to think alike," Spencer said. "In some ways, it's like being married."

But he added, "In all the time we knew each other, we never had a cross word."

Spencer said Ackerman was a kind and concerned teacher dedicated to writing and publishing clinically pertinent material for the student, the practitioner and his radiological colleagues.

"He was "100 percent behind the students and their getting an excellent education," Spencer said. "He might have come across sometimes as being a little tough on them, but the truth was, he just really wanted the students to develop excellence."

Behind the scenes, the private and reserved Ackerman, who was also an accomplished photographer and an avid reader, was known to have a quick and dry wit. He could be unusually kind and unexpectedly generous in his dealings with friends and colleagues.

Monica Merlo, D.V.M., owner of Merlo Veterinary Imaging, Essex, U.K., relayed an experience she had with Ackerman when she was a young veterinarian living in Italy back in 1995.

"I was visiting the U.S. for a couple of months and I remember reading his book and thinking, maybe I should visit him," Merlo recalled. "I was sure he would refuse, as he did not know me. There was no e-mail at the time in Italy, so I wrote to him and was very surprised when he accepted immediately. At that time, he and his family had just relocated to Kentucky. When months later, I finally made my trip, he was not only willing to have me visit, his family also gave me hospitality in their home."

Merlo spent two weeks with the Ackerman family.

"It was a great experience," she said. "I was really grateful for what he did for me."

Ackerman had extensive experience in MRI and CT scanning, and in addition to his textbook, authored or coauthored numerous scientific articles in the field of veterinary radiology.

He is survived by his wife, Lourdes Corman, M.D., of Huntsville and two children.



Dr. Norm Ackerman

CVM faculty, students show off knowledge, Gator spirit at "Foot Bowl"

Showing their capacity for fun as well as learning, faculty from the UF College of Veterinary Medicine's large animal clinical sciences department, along with several veterinary students, participated in the inaugural "Foot Bowl" as part of the International Equine Conference on Laminitis and Diseases of the Foot, held in Palm Beach Nov. 2-4.

The conference is a joint effort involving UF, the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine and The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine.

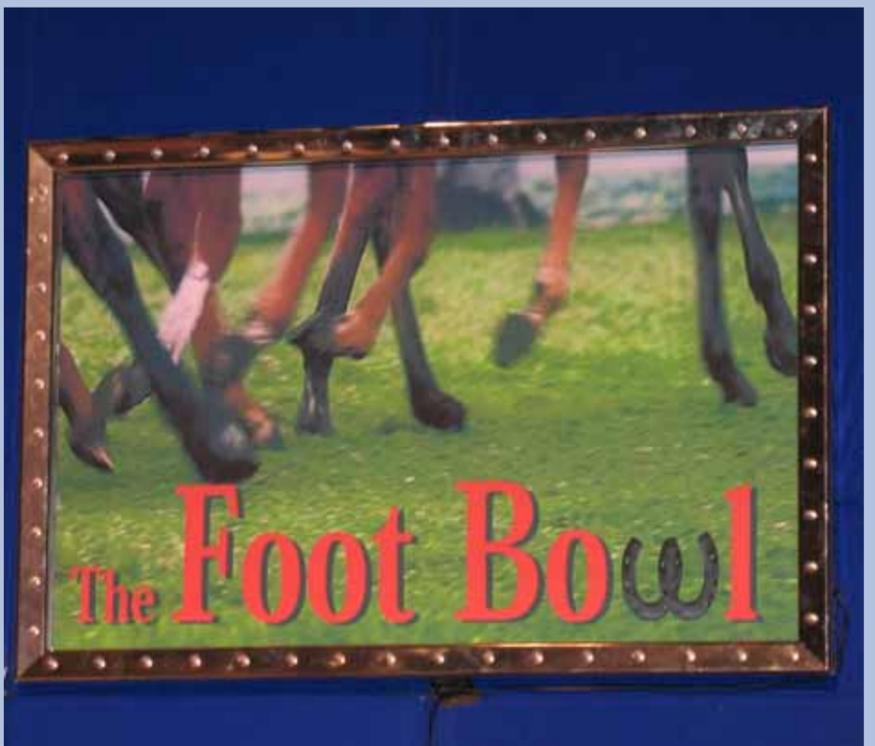
The Foot Bowl was billed as an intercollegiate game of education and fun, and according to these UF participants, fun was indeed what the event turned out to be.



Participants prepare for their turn at the microphone and questions relating to equine lameness.



From left to right: Dr. Amanda House, Dr. Michael Porter, Dr. Sarah Matyjaszek, Benjamin Stoughton, Dr. Orlaith Cleary, Dr. Alison Morton, Peter Kolacia, Lauren Crescenzi, Jeremy Campfield and Erin Barney.



A sign promoting the event.

UF CVM researcher: Beachgoers who stay high and dry may also stay healthier

Attention snowbirds and spring breakers: Beachgoers who stay high and dry may have healthier fun in the sun than those frolicking on wet sand or in the water, according to a University of Florida veterinary researcher.

“Our objective was to understand whether beach sand could pose a health risk to beachgoers,” said Tonya D. Bonilla, a graduate student in the UF College of Veterinary Medicine’s department of infectious diseases and pathology who studied three South Florida beaches over a two-year period to see whether human health risks appear to increase based on the level of sand exposure.

“What we found was that there was no increased health risk due to exposure to sand on the upper beach,” Bonilla said. “However, the longer the period of time people spent in the water and in the wet sand, the higher the probability that they would experience some gastrointestinal illness.”

Bonilla’s research was conducted at Fort Lauderdale Beach, Hollywood Beach and Hobie Beach. There were 882 respondents who participated in the pilot epidemiological study and 609 who participated in the control group.

Beachgoers were made aware of the study and, if willing to participate, were given a survey form to complete four days after their beach visit. The questionnaire focused on type and duration of beach activity and inquired whether participants became ill during the four days after the beach visit. The control group consisted of people randomly chosen from the general population who had not visited a beach in at least nine days.

Jay M. Fleisher, Ph.D., an associate professor in the College of Osteopathic Medicine at Nova Southeastern University, analyzed the epidemiological data collected in the study.

“Our findings suggest that there is an increased risk of acquiring gastroenteritis the longer a bather either sits in the wet sand or stays in the water,” Fleisher said. “The probability that an individual will become sick increases over expected non-exposure rates from six out of 1000 people for a 10-minute exposure to approximately 12 out of 100 people for a two-hour stay in the wet sand.”

“For exposure to water, these rates increase from seven out of 1000 people affected over expected non-exposure rates for a 10-minute stay to approximately seven out of 100 people exposed for a 70-minute stay,” Fleisher added. “Both show a clear dose response relationship in risk with increasing time of exposure. These estimates of increased risk might seem small

but when one considers how many people use this beach in the course of a year, we can end up with a substantial public health problem,” Fleisher said.

While fecal indicator levels in the near-shore waters of South Florida’s recreational beaches are routinely monitored, sand samples from the surf zone — the wet sand — and the upper beach are not. Beach sand may become contaminated by gull droppings and other sources of fecal-derived organisms that then diffuse into wet sand and water, said Bonilla, whose research was published in the *Marine Pollution Bulletin*. Her work, part of her master’s thesis work at Nova Southeastern University, was funded by a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency. She has continued her water-quality work at UF, where she is pursuing her doctoral degree.

Her former mentor, Andrew Rogerson, Ph.D., a professor of biology who is now at Marshall University in West Virginia, is a study co-author. Their findings suggest water is an important factor for pathogen transmission.

“At this point, we don’t know whether the increased health risk is due to pathogen exposure,” Bonilla said. “To really understand this, a more comprehensive and targeted epidemiological approach is needed.”

Helena Solo-Gabriele, Ph.D., a professor of environmental engineering at the University of Miami and a collaborator in the National Science Foundation’s Oceans and Human Health Center, is working on understanding how fecal indicator levels correlate with pathogen levels in her own research. Her work primarily focuses on environmental measurements, specifically of microbial indicators in water.

In addition to evaluating the potential human health effects of microbes from beach sands, Bonilla’s paper provides new information concerning the reservoirs and sources of fecal indicator bacteria, Solo-Gabriele said.

“This study emphasizes that beach sands serve as the most significant reservoir of fecal indicator bacteria, and shows that the situation is not isolated to one specific beach, but can be widespread across regions,” she said.

“Bonilla and her collaborators provide a mechanistic explanation for the potential spread of fecal indicator bacteria through gull droppings and subsequent distribution through natural diffusion in the environment, as well as by people walking on the beach,” Solo-Gabriele said. “The suggestion of an association between fecal indicator levels in sand and illness rates among humans is very significant and points to the need to conduct more comprehensive studies of beach sand.”



Tonya Bonilla

Veterinary anesthesia technician joins elite ranks with national certification

A University of Florida veterinary anesthesia technician has become the first UF veterinary technician, and only the second in the state, to receive certification in this specialty by the Academy of Veterinary Technician Anesthetists.

Terry Torres, an employee of UF’s Veterinary Medical Center, learned in December that she had passed her certification examination. For her, the process was a way to validate 20 years of experience as an animal anesthetist.

“Specialty certification should allow technicians to advance up the career ladder,” Torres said. “It definitely has promoted interest from the rest of the staff, and we have another technician applying to take the 2009 examination.”

Applicants must have at least 6,000 hours of experience as a certified veterinary technician, with 75 percent of that time spent providing anesthesia. To be considered for the certification process, applicants must also have amassed at least 40 hours of continuing education relating to anesthesia over a five-year span, and must submit a case log of 50 or more anesthesia cases as well as four detailed case reports.



Veterinary technician Terry Torres in the clinic, working with Joshua, a Chihuahua. (Photo by Dr. Sheilah Robertson)

The eyes have it



Dr. Dennis Brooks examines the eye of a young green sea turtle, one of several being rehabilitated by Clearwater Marine Aquarium that were brought to UF’s Veterinary Medical Center because they have tumors growing near their eyes. According to Aquatic Animal Health Program Associate Director Mike Walsh, these tumors can grow into the eye and blind the animals so they can not see to find food to eat, thus resulting in the potential for them to starve to death in the wild. The UF ophthalmology service has been helping to determine if the turtles are truly blind or if surgery could be used to remove the tumor tissue and restore their sight. Walsh added that the tumor problem is prevalent in this species and can combine with cold water temperatures in winter months to make it difficult for them to survive. (Photo by Mark Hoffenberg)