

the NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA • COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE
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UF dairy veterinarian's reputation as animal welfare advocate grows

BY SARAH CAREY

Jan Shearer, D.V.M., is an innovator who has been honored by institutions ranging from the USDA to the American Association of Bovine Practitioners to his alma mater, The Ohio State University, for his many contributions to agriculture and animal health. Whether in the trenches teaching hoof care to dairy workers or suited up behind a podium lecturing on bovine welfare, Shearer, the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine's dairy extension veterinarian and chairman of the AABP's animal welfare committee, doesn't do anything halfway.

People notice.

Geni Wren, editor and associate publisher of Bovine Veterinarian magazine, is one of them. An admirer of Shearer's for some time, Wren approached him about a subject she felt needed to be dealt with in her magazine — euthanasia and personal beliefs.

"She came to me and said, we need to put together and discuss some bovine welfare issues, and one pretty important topic is euthanasia," Shearer said. "So she sent me a few questions, and I responded."

The result was a cover story titled "The Kindest Act" in the January issue of the publication, which also contained an editorial written by Wren. Both the article and the editorial stressed that euthanasia, while an uncomfortable topic to many people, is a critical part of veterinary medicine.

"The hardest part of euthanasia is getting over the emotional aspect and coming to grips with doing it," Shearer said. "This is about these cows we find on farms that often are down or dying and the dairyman doesn't have the emotional strength to put them down because it's his animal. We as vets need to step up to the plate and do it for them."

Shearer said he knows owners of large dairy cattle operations in Florida and elsewhere who

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— Dr. Jan Shearer
 UF dairy cattle extension veterinarian

struggle with conducting euthanasia on their own animals.

"It's not something anyone wants to do, but it is what you have to do to relieve animal suffering," Shearer said. "It's not always easy, but you have to be able to do it."

As a member of the college admissions committee, Shearer said he often asks prospective students whether they are capable of conducting euthanasia if they have to.

"In reality, if you get into practice, you find that you are often in a position where it is necessary to end a life, and not always for good, sound medical reasons," he said. "While students need to learn how to save lives, it's absolutely essential that they know how to end it when there is no medical means to relieve the suffering. Euthanasia is something we don't talk about enough here."

So Shearer, who travels extensively as part of his extension responsibilities as well as in his AABP role, takes his message on the road.

"I speak a lot of places and talk about it a lot, because I realize it's one of those things you have to do," Shearer said.

He also sees bovine lameness and animal welfare as interrelated.

"Part of the problem is that livestock producers don't understand that prey animals like cattle instinctively hide their pain and discomfort," he said.

"In working with lameness problems over the years, I've come to understand how good these animals are at masking their pain. In the wild, prey animals that are injured or hurt are going to be the first ones to get eaten, so cattle have a natural instinct to hide pain and discomfort. Translating that information to dairymen and getting them to deal with lameness

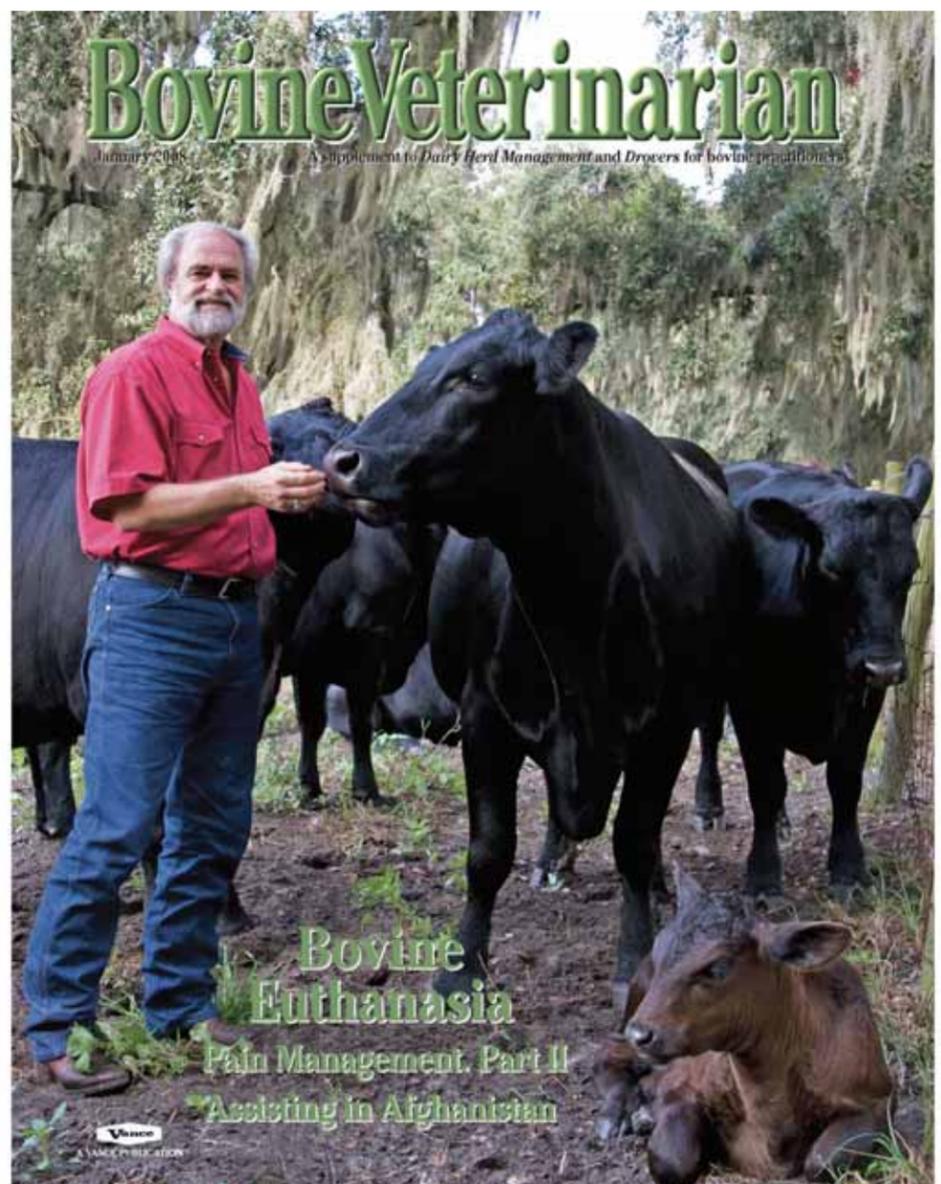


Photo by Mark Hoffenberg

disorders more promptly is a very important message."

In January, Shearer spoke at Iowa State University's College of Veterinary Medicine, demonstrating hoof-trimming techniques to as many as 80 veterinary students and giving lectures on lameness awareness and foot care. He's lectured on animal welfare at Cornell's Dairy Institute and to its ethics class for freshman students. In February, he spoke to The Ohio State University's Food Animal Club on euthanasia and welfare of cattle. Shearer plans to address UF's food animal club about animal welfare issues later this month.

Part of what spurred Shearer to become such an advocate for better communication about euthanasia was an article he read in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association in 2004 by Dr. Cydria Manette.

"What she pointed out, and what was so helpful, was how we deal with this issue as veterinarians," Shearer said. "I used to go to the Humane Society many years ago to put animals down who were unadoptable. I remember thinking, this isn't what I signed up for when I became a vet. I had to make myself mechanical — draw up the solution and find the vein and block out all of the emotional issues to get it done. It's not easy to do when you're sitting there looking at the puppy or kitten."

Coping techniques can include projection of negative feelings onto the animal to be euthanized, and compartmentalizing to make the job "easier."

But is euthanizing an animal ever easy? Shearer said it isn't, nor should it be.

He said he asks food animal students how many have dealt with euthanasia and if the matter bothers them.

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“If they say no, they probably shouldn’t be here in vet med,” Shearer said. “This profession isn’t for them. All of us have had to face the paradox of our roles; we nurture and care for our animals knowing they will one day be slaughtered for food. Or, we must deal with the reality that some pets are not adoptable and must be euthanized.”

Therein lies the subject of an inner conflict that is so difficult, Shearer said.

“With respect to livestock, some of the conflict is fueled by anthropomorphism, which through TV, movies, etc. has had tremendous influence on our thinking,” he added. “It has caused many of us to develop coping strategies such as misrepresentation and compartmentalization to accomplish unpleasant things. But as Manette points out, these coping strategies rarely give us peace of mind, since they aren’t authentic ways of dealing with this issue.”

If there is a solution to the conflict posed by euthanasia, it might be the concept animal welfare expert Dr. Temple Grandin of Colorado State University describes as “sacred ritual.”

“A concept she uses is that all life has value and all life is important, and worthy of dignity and respect,” Shearer said. “She bows her head and says a little prayer when she goes to a packing plant. It’s a reverence for life, not in the religious sense, but more the sense that all life is sacred.”

These words of Albert Schweitzer resonate with Shearer: “To the man who is truly ethical, all life is sacred, including that from which the human point of view seems lower. Man makes distinctions, under the presence of necessity, as for example, when it falls to him to decide which of two lives he must sacrifice in order to preserve the other. But through it all, he knows that he bears the responsibility for the life that is sacrificed.”

“We do our best to raise these animals up and make sure they are well cared for; that’s our role as vets,” Shearer said. “When that day comes — when euthanasia or slaughter is necessary — we do our very best to make sure the process is as smooth and humane as can possibly be. We don’t treat these animals disrespectfully; we treat them with dignity all the way through.

“I know that I am still going to struggle, but knowing that I am treating them humanely and with the respect they deserve authenticates my true feelings.”

These days, Shearer spends about half of his time on his Master Hoof Care Program, for which he was honored in 2003 by the USDA. The program offers training to dairy workers, including farm health technicians, private claw trimmers and veterinarians from all over the world. Its goal is to aid in the early detection and treatment of potential lameness disorders in cattle, before problems become critical.

The remainder of his time is spent on his work in the animal welfare communication arena.

“The lameness issue has brought me to a greater sensitivity and awareness of animal welfare issues,” Shearer said. “It’s something I couldn’t have anticipated, but the last five to 10 years in particular, I’ve started to focus a lot more on these issues.”

He added that when he started out in the field of food animal medicine years ago, the primary objective in production veterinary medicine was to look out for the client’s economic welfare.

“This was almost to the extent that this was the highest priority, while animal welfare was somewhere second,” Shearer said. “That’s going to sound strange to some. But I see today that this is becoming entirely different. What I try to share with people I work with today is that those things need to be coupled.

“The vet’s responsibility is to look out for the welfare of livestock; that’s got to be paramount,” Shearer said. “My objective is to share that message as best I can. Improved animal welfare and improved profitability; I think they can go hand in hand.”

Veterinary surgery resident takes award for most outstanding presentation during surgery society meeting

University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine small animal surgery resident Stanley Kim, B.V.Sc., received top honors for the most outstanding resident presentation at this year’s annual Veterinary Orthopedic Society meeting, held recently in Big Sky, Mont.

Kim’s presentation dealt with the effect of tibial plateau leveling osteotomy and tibial tuberosity advancement — two surgical techniques used to correct tears of the cruciate ligament in dogs — on femorotibial contact mechanics.

“Dr. Antonio Pozzi, assistant professor of small animal surgery, who also gave an excellent podium presentation and two posters at the meeting, deserves a great deal of the credit for Stan’s success, as he provided excellent mentorship through his graduate research program,” said Dan Lewis, D.V.M., a professor and UF small animal surgery resident program coordinator. Lewis was also a coauthor with Pozzi on Kim’s paper.

Kim attended and presented his work as a recipient of one of the Veterinary Orthopedic Society’s Mark Bloomberg Awards, which provide financial support for deserving residents to attend the meeting and present their research. The awards are based on a review of their scientific abstracts.



Dr. Stanley Kim

The Veterinary Page is the college’s monthly online internal newsletter. Story ideas may be submitted to Sarah Carey, editor, at careys@vetmed.ufl.edu.



Dr. Jan Shearer speaks with Amanda Eason, Miss Rodeo Iowa 2007, a freshman veterinary student at Iowa State University’s College of Veterinary Medicine, during a foot care and claw trimming laboratory Shearer held there in January. (Photo by Tracy Raef)



Faculty and staff from Iowa State University’s College of Veterinary Medicine joined Dr. Jan Shearer at Iowa State’s dairy during a hands-on foot care laboratory Shearer conducted in January. (Photo by Tracy Raef)



Following a lecture held during Iowa State University’s College of Veterinary Medicine foot-care program, Dr. Jan Shearer answers questions from interested participants. (Photo by Tracy Raef)

*Milk:
It does a body good*



Gracie, an 11-week-old giraffe, eyeballs a bottle of milk proffered by her owner, Christine Janks, on March 13 in the UF Veterinary Medical Center. Janks and her husband, Barry, came to visit Gracie and feed her following successful treatment at UF's VMC for a gastrointestinal illness. The Jankses, who own Carson Springs Farm Wildlife Foundation in Gainesville, took Gracie home the following morning.

Photo by Sarah Kiewel



Christine Janks visits with Gracie at the Veterinary Medical Center on March 13. A week later, Janks reported that Gracie was "doing great" and "eating up a storm" after returning home.

Gracie was first purchased from the Natural Bridge Zoo in Natural Bridge, Va., and was delivered to the Jankses' wildlife sanctuary March 4. She became ill shortly thereafter.

"We never had a tame giraffe before, but we had wild captive ones on the farm we owned in South Africa," Janks said. "She was bottle-raised, so she is very tame and loves people. Giraffes are very sensitive to change and she missed her human mom very much when she first came here."

Now, though, Gracie has bonded strongly with her new owners. The Jankses' main business has in the past been Thoroughbred race horses, but they were "always interested in cheetah and exotic cats." The couple established their wildlife sanctuary in 2007.

Photo by Sarah Kiewel

Yes, Way! "Olive's Way" benefit for UF veterinary cancer program raises \$320,000

A benefit hosted March 11 in Boca Raton by grateful clients of the University of Florida Veterinary Medical Center's oncology service raised \$320,000 to support cancer research and care for both small and large animals affected by the disease.

Lisa and Harry Posin, whose 4-year-old Maltese, Olive, was successfully treated at UF in 2007 for kidney cancer, organized and underwrote the cost of the event. Recently the Posins, who live in Boca Raton, created a program known as "Olive's Way" dedicated to raising funds for UF's veterinary cancer programs. All "Olive's Way" contributions go directly to the college, earmarked to the oncology service.

"Funds we raise will be used both to support the UF oncology service's ongoing efforts and to expand the research that this world-class team performs," Harry Posin said. "We fully believe that due to the severity of Olive's illness and the complex nature of the surgery, had it not been for the skilled oncology team at UF, we would likely have lost Olive on the operating table."

Olive underwent a complicated surgical procedure that involved the removal of one kidney and a portion of her adrenal gland. She subsequently has undergone eight chemotherapy treatments and has regained her strength and normal body functions.

"The level of postoperative support to Olive, and to us, was beyond compare to any that we have seen, whether animal or human," Posin added. "The sincerity to which the entire oncology team cares for the patient is remarkable as well as their ongoing support and consultation with our local oncologist."



A photo of Olive sits elegantly above a shrimp tray at a reception held in Boca Raton March 11 by Lisa and Harry Posin. The event was held to raise funds for "Olive's Way," a program dedicated to support UF's veterinary oncology service.



Harry Posin, holding Olive, stands at far left next to Dr. Rebecca Seaman, an oncologist with Coral Springs Veterinary Hospital, Dr. Nick Bacon from UF's oncology service, and Romayne Berry.

(Photo by Studio 3 Photographics)



From left to right are Dr. David Lurie and Dr. Rowan Milner from UF's oncology service; CVM's Senior Director of Development and Alumni Affairs Zoe Seale; CVM Dean Glen Hoffsis; CVM oncology surgeon Dr. Nick Bacon, holding Olive; and Lisa and Harry Posin, who established the "Olive's Way" program to benefit the veterinary oncology service at UF.

(Photo by Studio 3 Photographics)

Back to College for Gator Nation

UF alumni visit veterinary college's disaster response exhibit site Feb. 22 as part of weekend activities



A demonstration horse is equipped with the Anderson Sling, which is used for advanced technical rescue.

(Photo by Sarah Carey)



Attendees tour the equine technical rescue ambulance.

(Photo by Sarah Carey)



CVM's Director of Medical/Health Administration answers questions after the general presentation to "Back to College" attendees. The rescue A-frame and practice horse appear in the background.

(Photo by Sarah Carey)



In back row are UF veterinarian Julie Levy; John Friary; pre-vet student Kathy Pennenga; volunteer Judith Martin; senior veterinary student Mike Reese; Gainesville veterinarian Debbie Cottrell; her husband, Ian Cottrell; pre-vet student Anik Chavez; and pre-vet student Jaime Willson. In front row are pre-vet student Lauren Unger; lab technician Sylvia Tucker; sophomore student Angela Avok; graduate student Patty Dingman; UF veterinarian Cynda Crawford; volunteer Mark Martin and sophomore veterinary student Cynthia Jeyapaul.

(Photo courtesy of Dr. Julie Levy)

CVM volunteers participate in Palm Beach County event

Volunteer veterinarians and cat lovers took a bite out of cat overpopulation during "Op Around the Clock," a 24-hour neutering event for cats held in West Palm Beach in January.

The event was the brainchild of animal control director Dianne Sauve and shelter veterinarian Gloria Livadas, who sought a way to reduce the backlog of pet and feral cats awaiting neutering surgery. Local veterinarians volunteered to help the shelter reach its goal of sterilizing 400 cats in 24 hours.

Volunteers from UF veterinary college's Operation Catnip feral cat neutering program and West End Animal Hospital in Newberry made the five-hour trip to to cover the 1 a.m. shift focusing on feral cats.

The team neutered more than 100 cats in five hours, bringing the clinic to an early conclusion. When the counts were in, a total of 415 cats were neutered, setting what UF team organizer Dr. Julie Levy believes is a world record for cat neutering.

"The Palm Beach team greeted us like royalty when we arrived around midnight," Levy said. "The volunteers from Operation Catnip and West End Animal Hospital were thrilled to see an animal control facility approaching the cat overpopulation problem with such a fun and creative tactic.

"We were proud to be invited to be a part of this ambitious undertaking and hope its success will encourage other communities to embrace feral cat neutering as well," she added.

Gainesville veterinarian Debbie Cottrell of West End Animal Hospital, along with her husband, Ian Cottrell, are active in Operation Catnip and made the trip to West Palm Beach as well.

"My husband and I were honored to be part of this team that helped another city in Florida bring attention to the pet overpopulation problem," Cottrell said. "We were surprised at the number of local private practitioners and technicians who volunteered to do four-hour surgery shifts in the middle of the night. What a cool bunch of people."

Former UF veterinary hospital panther patient Big Guy is focus of chapter in new children's book

A new book titled "Florida's Famous Animals," by writer J.G. Annino, features a chapter devoted to the UF Veterinary Medical Center's most famous panther patient, Big Guy.

Hot off the press, the book is aimed at children and features chapters devoted to 13 of the state's best known critters. One of them is Big Guy, a then-3 year-old panther who was treated at UF in 1984 after being found clinging to life by a truck driver near the Everglades..

The book details Big Guy's plight and the care he received at UF and later at White Oak Conservation Center in Yulee. Mentioned are several former UF veterinary team members, including surgeons Jamie Bellah and Gayle Donner; zoo medicine veterinarian George Kollias; the late Dr. Mark Bloomberg and Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission veterinarian Melody Roelke.

Larry Lansford, a communications specialist who worked at the CVM for a time and is now at the UF College of Education, provided the photo of Big Guy used in the chapter.

Big Guy left UF for further rehabilitation at White Oak, which is where he lived out his days before dying at 13 years of age.

Copies of the book are available at www.globepequot.com for \$9.95.

