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Dean Robert R. Marshak

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Dr. Robert R. Marshak became the ninth dean of the School of Veterinary Medicine in September 1973, succeeding Dr. Mark W. Allam.

Immediately after graduation from the New York State College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University in 1945, Dr. Marshak began what was to become a large dairy cattle practice in Springfield, Vermont. One of his clients was Dr. Alan M. Butler, who was professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School and a renowned clinical investigator of that era. Dr. Butler encouraged Dr. Marshak to engage in clinical investigation at the Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston. With this arrangement, Dr. Marshak conducted studies on metabolic diseases in cattle, making frequent trips to Boston, often at night, with samples for laboratory analysis. At the same time, he engaged in an intensive self-learning program in biochemistry. Dr. Marshak developed friendships with leading authorities in the field of metabolic diseases, and in 1956 he was organizing chairman for a prestigious conference on Calcium and Phosphorus Metabolism in Man and Animals with Special Reference to Pregnancy and Lactation at the New York Academy of Sciences.

These activities heightened a basic desire on the part of Dr. Marshak to pursue scholarly interests. At one time he considered moving to Boston so that he would be near Harvard University. At the time when he was engaged in these thoughts, Penn's Veterinary School was searching for someone to replace Dr. John D. Beck, professor of medicine, who was leaving after many years in residence at the School.

Dean Mark W. Allam had interviewed many candidates for the position but was unable to find the right individual. Through a series of circumstances, Dean Allam learned about this remarkable veterinarian from Vermont. At this time Dr. Alan Butler entered the picture and strongly recommended Dr. Marshak, who was invited to come to Penn for an interview. After the initial interview, Dean Allam knew that the search for a professor of medicine had ended, and in 1956 Dr. Marshak was appointed to this position.

Penn's Veterinary School now had a professor with some extraordinary concepts about how clinical veterinary medicine should develop. Dr. Marshak was keenly concerned about the great disparity between the programs for clinical sciences in medical schools and those in veterinary schools, and he lost no time in attacking this situation in a variety of ways. Fundamental to Dr. Marshak's concepts is the premise that students should be taught basic principles of medicine

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versus the "cookbook" style of learning. For this rea
son he urged that the basic science departments be
strengthened and that was done, leading to a much
closer relationship between clinical and basic sciences.
Next, he recruited individuals for the clinical sciences
department so that they would have time available for
research, a situation which never before existed in the
Veterinary School. This required major additions to
the clinical staff and this took place.
All of these, and other changes, eventually forged a
clinical department that is one of the best in the world.

Many of these became leaders in various clinical
 specialties. Dr. Marshak also engaged in a major
revamping of work schedules for clinicians in the hos
apitals so that they would have time available for
research, a situation which never before existed in the
Veterinary School. This required major additions to
the clinical staff and this took place.

Dr. Marshak is a charter diplomate of the Ameri
can College of Veterinary Internal Medicine and
served as president of this group from 1975-1976. He
has served on the editorial board of several journals, including the American Journal of Veterinary
Research, the Journal of the American Veterinary
Radiology Society, and the Cornell Veterinarian.

Today, many of those who underwent this training are
leaders in their particular field.

Many other major changes and improvements
occurred during Dr. Marshak's deanship. Some of
these are: a major addition to the Large Animal Hos
pital at New Bolton Center, a the creation of
VHUP on the Philadelphia campus; completion of the
C. Mahlon Kline Center for Orthopedics and Rehabil
itation; creation of new, innovative programs such as
a Program of Aquatic Animal Medicine
(AQUAVET), and the Center for Interactions of
Animals and Society; and major renovations in the
old quadrangle building to provide much needed
research space. During the years 1976 to 1982, Dr.
Marshak directed fund-raising efforts which realized
27.5 million dollars from the private sector, and from
1974 until present the appropriation from the
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania increased from $1.7
million to over $10.7 million. Since 1983, Dr. Marshak
has directed a major fund-raising effort known as the
Second Century Fund. To date, over 30 million
dollars has been raised in this effort.

Dr. Marshak has published over seventy scientific
papers, many of them on the subject of bovine
leukemia, but also on metabolic diseases and lepto
spirosis. He has published four major review articles.

Dr. Marshak's contributions to the profession were
recognized in 1968 when the University of Bern
awarded him an honorary degree of Dr. med. vet.

Despite the multifarious activities involved in
administering the Deans Office, Dr. Marshak has kept
uppermost the fundamental matters that nourish the
Veterinary School: high academic standards, research,
teaching, patient care, and community service. His
esprit de corps and his zest have inspired the School.
In spite of the great amount of time which he has
required to spend in political and fund-raising activ
ities, Dr. Marshak has become a major spokesman for
the profession. He has been superbly articulate. He has
embraced an extraordinarily broad constituency,
including the legislature, the alumni, the Pennsylvania
Veterinary Medical Association, agricultural groups,
human societies, the dog and cat world, zoo and
wildlife groups, and aquatic medicine.

As Dr. Marshak retires from the Deanship on July
1, 1987, he leaves a legacy that not only encompasses
his momentous professional and academic contribu
tions, but brilliantly reflects his role as a compassion
ate and understanding human being. He cared!

—John E. Martin, V.M.D.

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