**Supporting the Cause**

*Penn Vet Board of Overseers’ Krista Buerger deals with canine cancer head-on and steps up to support important translational research*

**BY MARY BERGER**

Krista Buerger brought her family’s Portuguese Water Dog, Kobe, to the Matthew J. Ryan Veterinary Hospital at the University of Pennsylvania (Ryan-VHUP) because she knew something was wrong. Kobe had become lethargic and he wasn’t eating.

It was Christmas night in 2008. And the dog was diagnosed with lymphoma—a devastating diagnosis for Krista and her family.

After deciding to do all they could to extend Kobe’s quality of life, Krista and her husband Reid opted to have Kobe treated with chemotherapy, an ongoing treatment that required several repeat visits to Ryan-VHUP. But the Buergers didn’t mind. They wanted what was best for their Kobe and were impressed by the experts taking care of the dog.

“When you’re at Penn Vet, you can feel the passion that every member of the staff radiates,” said Krista, who later became a member of Penn Vet’s Board of Overseers. “Everything we experienced at the hospital was incredibly impressive.”

While there waiting for their beloved Kobe to finish up his regular treatments, the Buergers learned about Dr. Karin Sorenmo, chief of Medical Oncology at Ryan-VHUP, and her work in cancer research. The Buergers’ interest was piqued, and, after delving a little deeper into the details of what Dr. Sorenmo’s cancer research included, they decided to help establish the Penn Vet Canine Mammary Tumor Shelter Program with a generous leadership gift from the Buerger Family Oncology Research Fund and the Kobe Buerger Oncology Resident Fund.

“We decided to give to this research area because of our experience with Kobe’s cancer treatment and because I have a family member who is a breast cancer survivor,” said Krista. “But it’s more than that. Once you get to know Penn Vet, you want to be able to give back and play a part in supporting its efforts.”

The Penn Vet Canine Mammary Tumor Shelter Program aims to provide high-quality care to homeless dogs in shelters that do not have access to the care they need to survive or find homes. At the same time, the program allows Dr. Sorenmo and her colleagues to continue advancing research on the biology of mammary tumors in dogs, which, in turn, has implications for advancing research of breast cancer in human patients.

In January, 2010, just one year after learning of Kobe’s lymphoma diagnosis, the beloved Portuguese Water Dog succumbed to the disease. And while Kobe is survived by three other PWDs owned by the family (Uni, age 8; Wilson, age 4; and Palmer, age 2), his life provided a lasting legacy for Penn Vet, its researchers, students and other clients working through the difficult process of dealing with a pet with cancer. And it’s because of the Buergers’ forethought, insight and generosity that the program has had success in its first year of operation.

“We’re glad we can play a part in keeping Penn Vet the fabulous resource that it is,” said Krista.