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## \$2 Million Gift for Teaching and Research Building: Interview With Steven W. Atwood

# \$2 Million Gift for Teaching and Research Building

Recently the School received an anonymous gift of \$2 million for the planned Teaching and Research Building in Philadelphia. The gift was facilitated by **Dr. Steven Atwood, V'80**, who is a mixed-animal practitioner on Martha's Vineyard. The state-of-the-art library in the new building will be named The Steven W. Atwood, V.M.D. Veterinary Medical Library in honor of Dr. Atwood. Mark Stuart, assistant dean for development, recently visited and talked with Dr. Atwood.

## You played a key role in securing a \$2 million gift for the School's new Teaching and Research Building from a former client. How did you come to know the donor?

This individual was someone whose animals I had taken care of from the days when I practiced on Nantucket Island. And interestingly enough, when I moved to Martha's Vineyard to practice here, it wasn't long after that this particular client brought her dogs to the Vineyard just so they could be treated by our practice.

## You must have had a very special veterinarian/client relationship.

Yes, I'd known her for many years. She was a very knowledgeable client who knew a lot about animals and knew a lot about their care. She asked good questions and really took incredible care of her animals. There was no question that they were absolutely spoiled and doted over. This person lived alone, so her animals really were her life, they were extremely important to her and therefore their care was very important to her, too.

## How did your conversations with this donor come about regarding support of the School and its new Teaching and Research Building?

I was aware that this individual had the potential to be very supportive and very generous with an animal related cause and it was my job to focus that orientation toward the University of Pennsylvania. This was something that I always wanted to do for Penn and the time seemed to be perfect. There is no question that to retain the preeminent position in veterinary medical teaching and research that Penn has to have this building. After several discussions with Dean Kelly, whose idea it was to seek funding for the School's new library, I ran that suggestion by this individual and it was very enthusiastically received.

## Did you spend much time in the School's library?

Not as much as I should have or my record would have been a little more enviable.

## Do you have any advice for Penn Veterinary alumni about how they could be helpful in securing funds for this new Teaching and Research Building?

The time is right and the time is critical. The School is on a tight timetable in that a large amount of money needs to be raised for this building in a relatively short time. I would say that we all have clients that are special. In some cases we're aware of their circumstances and their potential to help Penn. I think that it's really not very hard at all when you believe in something to convey that enthusiasm to a potential client/donor in a positive way, not only for Penn, but for veterinary medicine, for animals, for biomedical research, for comparative medicine. It's an easy sell. Alumni should not be bashful in broaching the subject of a large gift to a special client. It's a cause that's eminently worth supporting.

## Why did you choose Veterinary Medicine as a career?

When I was growing up I had an uncle who was a veterinarian (Dan Rice, V'63) and an aunt, his sister, who was a physician. During family holidays there would be discussions as to which was the better field and the veterinarian made a more persuasive argument than the physician. I think it all boiled down to a career in which animals were very important and the fact that as a veterinarian one could have a much broader grasp of medicine in general. One could be a radiologist, surgeon, ophthalmologist, dermatologist, anesthesiologist, all in one day. I thought I'd get to practice more medicine as a veterinarian than I would as a physician.

## Did you apply to several different veterinary schools?

Penn was my only choice.

## And you said it was three tries for Penn?

Three tries for Penn, once as a junior, which

I never counted. But as for the other two, the late 70s were difficult times for a New Englander to get into any veterinary school. Three times was not unusual for our class.

## Do you have a favorite Penn faculty member?

There were so many who I really respected and enjoy seeing to this day at conferences and meetings. I really enjoyed Dr. Fackelman, a former faculty member who retired to Maine and is running a hunting lodge. Dean Richardson was a great faculty member. Dr. Reef was wonderful. Dr. Joan O'Brien was special. Dr. Kelly, now our esteemed dean, was a fantastic profes-

sor of pathology. In fact, he brought me my first clinical case as a veterinary student. We were seniors on our TES Rotation (Trauma and Emergency Service), the precursor to the Emergency Service. He brought in his own cat, it had an abscess. I remember him being very calm. We were

kind of nervous, this was our first live patient. It wasn't a complex case, but we were nervous because it was his cat. He said, "Oh, don't worry, you'll be fine, just take your time, you know what to do." Dr. Kelly couldn't have been a better first client.

## Do you have any favorite Penn memories?

I would say that New Bolton Center brings back great memories of huge snow storms, field service calls, and the camaraderie of living with 15 other students at the farm house during large animal block.

## Where did you go after graduation?

Immediately after graduating from Penn, I took a one-year internship at the Central Hospital for Veterinary Medicine in New Haven, Conn. It was affiliated with the Comparative Medicine Department at Yale's Medical School. It turned out to be a fabulous internship because you had the benefit of boarded specialists there, but you also had fifteen private practitioners each with their own clinics in different parts of suburban New Haven. My first private

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Dr. Atwood and one of his clients, Senator Dole.

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practice position was at the Nantucket Animal Hospital, 15 miles off the coast of Massachusetts. That particular practice was owned and operated by Angell Memorial Animal Hospital in Boston. For two and a half years I was the only veterinarian on Nantucket Island. It was a real mixed practice. It was a place where it was not easy to refer cases. So even with only a year of experience under my belt, it was a very fast learning curve because I was really on my own. Of course, you could get on the phone and consult with the doctors at Angell Memorial, but really you were on your own out there. I developed a lot of expertise quickly. After four and one half years on Nantucket, we moved west to Martha's Vineyard and entered a new, developing practice. That's where I have been ever since.

**When you came into this practice did you see that there was a growing need for veterinary medicine at Martha's Vineyard due to its popularity as a resort?**

At the time I came here there was only one other practice which had been here for many years. It had grown to the point where it really couldn't expand any further. Another practice was a welcome addition to the island. There were certainly enough people, particularly in the summer and in the shoulder seasons, to make it feasible for a second veterinary hospital to operate. It seems that the island assimilated both practices very nicely and then as time went on two other practices opened here and they are doing well.

**Given the resort nature of the island what keeps you busy in the winter?**

The practices are still busy in the wintertime. It's never completely quiet. When I first came here winter could be fairly slow, so you might see one or two cases a day. Those days are long gone now, even in the dead of winter it's just manageable. In the summer it borders on being out of control. During the winters you can spend more time with your clients and try new procedures that you may not have done before.

**Do you do house calls?**

Yes, we do. We do farm calls and house calls. Because we have two veterinarians in our practice we are able to have one doctor in the office when one is out doing house calls. I'd say we

do many more horse and farm calls than we do house calls.

**Given that you're on an island, have you had to set up or structure your practice in any ways that are different than a mainland practice?**

That's a great question and the answer is yes. There are many things that we have had to do that are a little unusual for a suburban practice. I think all remote rural practices face some of the same obstacles: access to specialists, laboratory testing facilities, and consultations with colleagues. Being on this island we need to keep the ferry schedule in mind if we have an emergency case, particularly a horse that requires extensive or unique surgery. Arrangements have to be made before the ferry lines shut down so that you can get that case to a proper facility with 24-hour supervision. We've tried to become as self sufficient as possible by performing almost all of our laboratory work, including microbiology and culture sensitivity here. We send little laboratory work out. We use telemedicine and transmit our radiographs, ultrasound images, cytopathology slides, pictures of eyes or skin conditions to board certified specialists and get the answers back within a short time. Telemedicine and in house lab work have made it possible to offer services that many seasonal clients are used to getting from their mainland veterinarians. This has enabled me to develop close friendships with physicians in various specialties. For example, I have a friend who is a plastic surgeon on the faculty at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. We have worked together on cancer surgeries and reconstructive surgeries. We've been able to do that here rather than send the animal off island because of our mutual interests.

**Steve, what do you do in the few hours that you have available to yourself when you're not practicing veterinary medicine?**

The number one off duty activity is tennis. We're lucky to have an indoor tennis facility right next to the hospital. Sailing is another big interest of our family. Everybody, including the kids, likes to sail. We charter a large schooner sailboat, but we also have a smaller racing sailboat. We're fairly new to sailing but we have a lot of fun sailing during most of the year. Skiing in the wintertime is a big passion of mine, too.

**You have a picture of Walter Cronkite holding kittens in your office and you've shown me a picture of you with Bob Dole. Given Martha's Vineyard's celebrity status, who are some of your more famous clients?**

It varies from year to year depending on who is down here in the summer time. It really runs the gamut from Beverly Sills to Carol Burnett, Bill Murray, Dan Akroyd, Carly Simon, Mike Nichols, Diane Sawyer, and the author, David McCullough. There are the politicians, of course, that seem to populate the island in the summertime. The late John F. Kennedy, Jr. had a little black cat and a dog that we saw. His sister, Caroline, has a nice golden retriever that we have met. They all seem to love their animals. When they're here on the island they are not much into the celebrity thing, they just seem to want to take care of their animals.

## Scholarships

The Pfizer Scholarship has been awarded to **Erin Mairs V'02**. **Rachael Feigenbaum, V'01**, received the Barnstable County Agricultural Society scholarship. **Christina Fuoco, V'01**, was awarded a scholarship from the New Jersey Veterinary Foundation. The Pennsylvania Veterinary Foundation has awarded the Dr. Samuel B. Guss Memorial Scholarship to **Lori Miles, V'01**, the Dr. Samuel F. Scheidy Memorial Scholarship to **Regan Williams, V'01**, three Palace H. Seitz Memorial Scholarships to **Tracy A. Filler, V'02**, **Robin C. Valentine, V'02**, and **Rachel A. Kaufman, V'02**, three PVMA Auxiliary Scholarships to **Steven R. West, V'02**, **Christopher J. Gibson, V'02**, and **Ian B. Spiegel, V'02**, and the PVF Trustees Scholarship to **Adam D. Miller, V'01**. The Edward Bangs Kelley and Eliza Kelley Foundation, Inc. has given a scholarship to **Rachael Feigenbaum, V'01**. **Frieda Rest, V'02**, received a scholarship from the AVMA Professional Liability Insurance Trust. The Lloyd's Brokers and Kentucky Agents Joint Equine Research and Educational Program has awarded a scholarship to **Jamie Murphy, V'01**. The Maine Community Foundation for the Clifton K. & Martha A. Hale Scholarship Fund awarded a scholarship to **Carlin Jones, V'02**.