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The Irwin Foundation: Opportunity Scholarship Sponsor

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by Susan I. Finkelstein

“Although we focus on a single area of education, the funding we provide has a much more profound effect. The veterinary students of today will become the doctors, technicians, and research scientists of tomorrow, and their work will lead to many advancements that ultimately extend beyond animals to benefit humanity.”

—from the Irwin Foundation website

As the very first foundation to sponsor an Opportunity Scholarship, the Irwin Foundation has a single, focused purpose—helping veterinary schools and the students who attend them. The Foundation provides funding only to accredited schools within major universities, but scholarship recipients are chosen by the universities themselves.

Regina Pellegrin, V’04, the Foundation’s recipient of Penn Veterinary Medicine’s Opportunity Scholarship, graduated this year. During all of Regina’s time here, the Irwin Foundation Opportunity Scholarship did much to ease her financial burden and gave her the priceless gift of faculty mentorship, a unique relationship often continuing for many years.

Like many veterinary students, Regina recalls a lifelong veterinary ambition. “I have wanted to be a veterinarian for as long as I can remember. This is what I feel I am meant to do. My first job was as a room assistant at a general practice, from the time I was 16 years old until I was 20. For the past five years, I worked as an emergency nurse at a veterinary emergency and referral center in Valley Forge, Pa. I fell in love with emergency work. I am hoping to work in

emergency medicine after graduation. I love the feeling of helping and consoling animals during their greatest times of distress.

“The Irwin Foundation’s scholarship has meant so much to me—not only in helping reduce some of my debt, but in allowing me the rare opportunity to have a mentor here. That kind of support has just made all the difference in my educational experience at Penn Veterinary Medicine.”

The Foundation, located in Southfield, Mich., initially concentrated its efforts in veterinary medicine. In 1997, however, it began to direct some attention to veterinary technology and the lack of scholarships available to students seeking careers in this critical field. Since then, the Foundation has made several significant contributions designed to assist future veterinary technicians.

The Irwin Foundation also supports a variety of programs administered by veterinary schools as part of their educational mission, and it continually seeks new and innovative ways to enhance the learning experience. The types of support include cash donations for established programs, purchases of equipment and other items, and service contributions.

The Irwin Foundation is a legacy to two well-known educators in the Detroit area. Dr. James Irwin was an administrator at Detroit Public Schools and Dr. Claire Irwin was a professor at Wayne State University. Husband and wife, they both passed away in 1994.

Note: The Irwin Foundation has renewed their Opportunity Scholarship, which will be awarded to a member of the Class of 2008.

New Scholarship Established

Margaret Gerhard, a long-time friend of the School and owner of three Labrador retrievers, made a gift of \$100,000 to establish the Margaret Gerhard Endowed Merit Scholarship Fund. “This gift is made in honor of your highly esteemed and dedicated faculty and teaching staff at the Matthew J. Ryan Veterinary Hospital and at the one and only New Bolton Center,” said Ms. Gerhard to **Dean Alan Kelly** when she presented the check. “It is my wish and desire that the income from the Margaret Gerhard Merit Scholarship Fund will continuously reward and recognize the recipients for a job ‘well



done!’ and as such, encourage and inspire optimism, dedication, and hard work in other fellow students—to heal and help a wounded world with compassion and love for all animals.”

Class of 2005 White Coat Ceremony

The White Coat Ceremony, a tradition from medical schools and first introduced in 2001 at Penn Veterinary Medicine, was held for the Class of 2005 in Houston Hall on December 9, 2003. Many relatives and guests of the students attended the ceremony and the reception that followed.

The ceremony marks the end of the students’ training in the classroom, and the beginning of their clinical rotations, where they will apply the knowledge they have learned during the first two-and-a-half years of their four-year veterinary education. The evening also marked the final time the entire class would be together formally before Commencement on May 16, 2005.

Speakers included Dean Alan M. Kelly; faculty members; **Michelle Rosero, V’04**, class president; **Michael R. Moyer, V’90**, president of the Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical Association; and **Christine Bohn, V’02**, who spoke on behalf of the School’s Veterinary Medical Alumni Society. **W. Southard Jones, Jr., V’71**, and **Courtney Jones, V’98**, spoke on “The Family: Sharing Commitment.” Their son and brother, respectively, Luke, is a member of the Class of 2005.

Sponsors of the ceremony included the Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical Association and its local constituent veterinary medical associations: Brandywine, Capital City, Lehigh Valley, Northwestern, Suburban, and Western. The Veterinary Medical Alumni Society gave the students Penn brass pins to wear on their white coats.



Luke Jones, V’05, W. Southard Jones, Jr., V’71, and Courtney Jones, V’98.

Photograph by Addison Geary/addisongeary.com