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## A New and Improved PVMA

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# A New and Improved PVMA

By Susan I. Finkelstein

Established by 22 veterinarians just a year before the School's own founding in 1884, the Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical Association (PVMA) today serves more than 1,600 Pennsylvania veterinarians, 500 veterinary students, and thousands of veterinary clients and patients. The Commonwealth's only professional membership organization exclusively for veterinary medicine, PVMA "is committed to advancing animal welfare and human health while ensuring the vitality of the profession" (as stated in *keystone veterinarian*, its quarterly magazine). Its members come from all walks of veterinary life: small-animal, large-animal, exotic, bovine, and equine practitioners, as well as those in research and academia.

PVMA is affiliated with 18 local veterinary medical associations and the internationally recognized American Veterinary Medical Association. Members enjoy numerous benefits, including continuing education opportunities. But there is a more important reason for joining, as PVMA president **Timothy J. Ireland, V'90**, writes in the latest issue of *keystone veterinarian*. "You need PVMA to help protect your livelihood, and PVMA needs you to help monitor local ordinances and to strengthen our voice in Harrisburg. We need a network of members willing to talk to their elected officials and establish relationships so we have contacts in place in times of need."

Needless to say, because Penn has the only

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veterinary school in Pennsylvania, the PVMA has a special connection to School staff and alumni, many of whom are members and/or serve on the executive committee. The School is especially proud that **Joan Hendricks, V'79**, Henry and Corinne R. Bower Professor of Animal Medicine, was elected to the vice presidency of the PVMA last October (effective January 1, 2005). Because of the PVMA's unique

leadership structure, next year Dr. Hendricks will become president-elect, and then president the following year. "Once you're elected to V.P., you're on the train," Dr. Hendricks explains. "It's like a triumvirate, where the V.P., president-elect, and current president all work together. Also, the immediate past president stays involved. It's a way of providing continuity."

Recently, PVMA presidents have addressed issues particularly important to them, both personally and professionally: **Michael Moyer, V'90**, immediate past president, was actively involved in shelter medicine and the feral-cat overpopulation problem; Dr. Ireland is chair of the PVMA's Animal Law Taskforce. Of increasing relevance to veterinarians, these topics may slip under the radar during the routines of daily practice.

Dr. Hendricks is no exception. "Those are all areas that I find interesting, but I wasn't thinking about any them in my day-to-day," she says. "I think most practitioners think about how to have a good practice, have a good life. And yet there are important issues that vets should be involved in.... You can make a real difference by being in organized veterinary medicine, like the PVMA. The PVMA itself, because the last several presidents have taken so many actions that have made a real difference, is beginning to raise the profile of these issues to the point where the public has a reason to care."

So what does Dr. Hendricks hope to accomplish during her presidency? "If I had to pick my 'agenda item,' it might be to connect veterinary medicine to the urban centers, and vice versa in small or big ways.... We're the only vet school in a major metropolitan setting, so while most vet schools don't have the option of training their students in a setting where that's an obvious thing to do, we are. And we could do so much more."

"One thing I would definitely want to do as president is to make sure that anyone in the School who is eligible is a member of PVMA. I think that's really important. But along with that, every eligible person in the Commonwealth should be a member, because then the power of the association becomes much, much greater. Then the PVMA can say, 'We speak for all of veterinary medicine [in the Commonwealth].' ... The things the School is trying to do for veterinary medicine and what the PVMA is



Joan Hendricks, V'79

trying to do as the voice of veterinary medicine are complementary."

Traditionally, many women, younger graduates, and students have not thought much about being part of organized veterinary medicine. In the past, the group's image was that its membership was predominantly older males, and did not reflect the growing diversity of the veterinary profession. Certainly this problem has been recognized and steps are being taken to remedy it, at all levels of organized veterinary medicine. "The problem is a generational issue, so the PVMA is reaching out to new graduates. It was seen as a club in the past. That's not what this organization is now. It exists so that we can really try to change things. How great would it be if we could have a shelter medicine training program that's part of the School, and as part of that, we could do research on what makes the biggest difference, what promotes responsible pet ownership?"

Today's PVMA, with professional support, can help create, shape, and respond to legislation and regulations that directly affect the practice of veterinary medicine in Pennsylvania. By fostering stronger relations with the media, it also can help maintain the public's well-deserved confidence in veterinary medicine. Here is a place where all Pennsylvania veterinarians together can form a collective, powerful voice. Truly, the PVMA represents and serves its members as no other organization can. ■