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Dean's Message

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Since before written history, the connection with animals has been a precious feature of the human experience. We have long relied on domestic animals to enrich and enliven our existence through their companionship, work, and service. Recent tragedies have reminded us just how intense this emotional connection can be. Last year, the hurricanes that struck the Gulf Coast displaced thousands of people and their animals; veterinarians were drawn into the public outcry to help the animals and people stay together. More recently, we have been reminded of the strength of the human-animal bond as Barbaro exploded onto the horse-racing scene. He came to the Kentucky Derby a champion and emerged as a legend-in-the-making. Clearly, his dominant performance forged the links between Barbaro and his owners Roy and Gretchen Jackson, his trainer Michael Matz, his jockey Edgar Prado and his fans across the globe. We seemed to be more than just connecting with him—we were identifying with this horse. We all felt the surge of energy as he galloped down the stretch in Louisville to a commanding victory.

Just as powerfully, we felt the pain when Barbaro suffered a terrible injury in the opening furlong of the Preakness. In the days since, the Jacksons have responded to media questions about why they and people all around the world want so much for this three-year-old colt to survive, regardless of cost. It could be Barbaro's beauty or his extraordinary athleticism. Perhaps it is an ancient, even prehistoric connection between people and equines.

Whatever the reason, Barbaro's collapse and the expert care he received brought a new awareness to the technology and advancements in veterinary medicine. The sight of Barbaro in the hospital, along with the articulate updates by Dr. Dean Richardson, had a huge impact on people, bringing renewed attention to the distinctive skills and healing touch of veterinarians. Ordinarily out of the headlines, veterinarians are committed to excellence, public service, helping animals, caring for all species. We are not merely doctors of animal science but lovers of animals ourselves, and we bring that uniquely human touch to our brand of medicine. At New Bolton Center, Dr. Richardson and his team of anesthesiologists, criticalists, veterinary nurses and fellow surgeons have focused media attention to that wonderful humanity as they care for Barbaro.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, too, has shown its awareness of the importance of veterinary medicine to animals and people, not only in the

region, but across the country. Governor Ed Rendell recently released the first \$13.5 million increment of the \$30 million included in the capital appropriations for rebuilding the Hospital facilities at New Bolton Center. This funding will allow two crucial steps to occur: (1) installing a digester to safely handle tissues from animals with infectious diseases, including any potential outbreaks of avian influenza, and (2) building a state-of-the-art facility for horses with colic and patients at high risk for infectious diseases. This facility will allow the superb care at New Bolton Center to be conducted more efficiently, more comfortably and it will allow us to identify and contain any new outbreaks more quickly and confidently. This is the beginning of a major rebuilding project that will lead to more animals being safely hospitalized while they receive the finest of care. Our goal is to match this amount with funds raised from private donations in our upcoming Capital Campaign, enabling a state-of-the-art rebuilding of the Widener Hospital facilities.

What was a tragedy has become an opportunity for the world to see veterinarians doing what they do best and to help them do it even better. We are grateful of course for state funding and generous contributions to the Barbaro Fund, but also for the apples, mints, carrots, flowers and hand-drawn signs left by the public at the entrance to New Bolton Center. These and the daily postings on the Web site all show how widespread and deep the bonds so many of us share with Barbaro and with all animals are. As we wait with both hope and fear for Barbaro's recovery, we appreciate anew the force of animal-human connections and the value of the people who work every day to maintain those incredible bonds.

—JOAN
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Photo by Sabina Louise Pierce