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Letter From Marilyn Weber, New VMAS President

Marilyn Weber
University of Pennsylvania

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I am truly honored to assume the leadership of such a prominent group of veterinary professionals and at such an important time in the history of the School and the profession. Thank you for the trust you place in me; I will do my best to lead, advocate, and initiate whenever necessary to ensure the future success of our School. I also want to extend my heartfelt thanks to **Dr. Jim Stewart, V'68**, outgoing president. His leadership has been invaluable.

As I assumed the VMAS presidency on October 1, 2005, and my transition comes at a pivotal time. **Dean Kelly** is retiring as of January 1, 2006, and **Joan Hendricks, V'79, GR'80**, has been named Dean Designate. Joan is the first female dean of any vet school in the country!

We successfully completed the Kresge Challenge, issued in June 2004 by the Kresge Foundation of Troy, Mich. The Challenge required that the School raise \$13 million through 5,500 new gifts and pledges by October 1, 2005 to receive a \$1.5-million grant. This was one of the largest challenge grants in its history and, at the time of issue, the largest ever for an Ivy League institution. And we did it!

Fiscal year 2005 was our most lucrative fundraising year ever: we raised a total of \$22 million. In October, Vernon and Shirley Hill made a \$10-million gift to the School for our new teaching and research building in Philadelphia, which has been named the Vernon and Shirley Hill Pavilion in their honor.

In view of the above accomplishments, our challenges for next year are self-evident. I hope to continue the important work the VMAS Board has undertaken in such areas as student relations, engagement of recent graduates, and alumni participation, to name a few. As VMAS president I will work to increase our presence as Penn alumni at national and regional meetings, as well as at the Farm

Show in Harrisburg. I also would like to see more alumni contact with classmates via listserves and contact with current students at the School. Projects on the horizon include the development of regional alumni clubs and student mentoring events.

During my tenure as president-elect, I had the opportunity to chair the Alumni Liaison Committee in its annual review of Ryan Hospital. What an incredible experience to view the daily operations of what has become the largest urban companion-animal teaching hospital in the country! The work accomplished on a daily basis is overwhelming.

During this review process, one area in particular continues to resonate with me — the relationship we, as graduates, have with current students. I believe we need to create more of a presence in the professional lives of our current students through personal contacts, visits to practices, and mentoring. This is an area of special interest to me and one I will bring to VMAS for its consideration. These relationships are crucial to our future. From the moment a student enters our School,

he/she becomes a member of a special family—the Penn Veterinary family. We must communicate this in every way possible while the students are still in school.

We each share in the above accomplishments, and thus we each have a responsibility to support the next generation of practitioners by giving back with our time, energy, and talents. I invite you back to Penn. You'd be surprised at what is going on in the Hospitals and classrooms.

In closing, I remind you of how important your input is today and every day. I encourage you to take a moment and share any suggestions or concerns you might have by contacting the editor of Bellwether. Thank you.

—MARILYN WEBER, V'75

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