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## Alumni Profile: Dr. Anna Worth, V'78

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## Dr. Anna Worth, V'78

*Champion of Animal Welfare*

BY NANCY WEST

**W**hen **Anna Worth, V'78**, graduated from veterinary school 31 years ago, she was one of very few women pursuing mixed-animal practice. So when she and her husband, **Robert Bergman, V'78**, sought a situation where they could practice together, they were confronted with a challenge.

"Many veterinarians didn't think I was capable of working on large animals, even though I'm almost six feet tall," recalled Dr. Worth, who grew up in Chadds Ford, Pa., surrounded by pet donkeys, dogs and cats.

She persevered, and the couple eventually found positions in a Montana mixed-practice, where Dr. Worth was the only female with a professional degree. Despite her obvious veterinary skill, the local ranchers complained she "didn't look like a woman" because she always wore jeans. "I was doing the exact same ranch work the guys were doing, which included performing c-sections on cows 24 hours a day throughout the spring," she remembered. "Despite that, my boss suggested I wear something more feminine. I continued to wear exactly what I wanted to wear."

This was just the beginning of Dr. Worth's trail-blazing efforts in veterinary medicine, not only as a female pioneer, but also as a champion for animal welfare and a leader in the profession.

In 1979, she and Dr. Bergman purchased West Mountain Animal Hospital, a mixed dairy practice in southern Vermont that included horses and llamas. "Our goal was to enhance the quality of care offered in this area. With that in mind, we immediately pursued accreditation from the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA)," she related. Their practice grew rapidly.

### Leading AAHA

"Following the AAHA guidelines for quality care was key to our success," noted Dr. Worth, who has just completed a one-year term as president of this venerable organization.

AAHA-accredited hospitals voluntarily choose to be evaluated on 900 standards in five categories: quality of care, diagnostic and pharmacy, management, medical records and facility. Currently, about 3,000 veterinary hospitals participate in this evaluation program.

"Consultants regularly visit these hospitals to ensure compliance with AAHA's standards for services and facilities," explained Dr. Worth. "When you are accredited by AAHA, you can be sure you are doing things right. That has always been of the utmost important to our practice."

Both as a board member and as president of AAHA, Dr. Worth's leadership has helped advance the veterinary profession. She is especially proud of her work in developing a strong student program. "We recently introduced mentoring guidelines that will be very valuable to students as they make the important transition from student to associate when they begin their first jobs," she related.

While traveling nationwide during the past year as AAHA president, Dr. Worth also observed the effects of the economic downturn on the veterinary profession. "While our profession is not recession-proof, it is certainly recession-resistant," she noted. "In some parts of the country, people have been forced to make hard choices about care for their companion animals. Fortunately, we have not seen this in our practice. Our clients are strongly bonded to their pets and we offer them options for treatment that will ensure a good level of care. Good communication with clients is the key."

“I’ve always been grateful to be a veterinarian and work in my passion.”

## Promoting Animal Welfare

Dr. Worth’s long history of service to the veterinary profession began in the early years of her practice when she first joined the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA) and quickly became a champion of animal welfare. She set her sights on two goals: instituting standards for humane euthanasia and preventing animal cruelty.

“At that time, animal shelters and veterinarians didn’t see eye to eye on how these important issues should be handled,” Dr. Worth explained. “I was able to get them to work together to ensure humane treatment.”

As a result of her efforts, the VVMA established a euthanasia board that ensures proper training in humane methods of euthanasia throughout the state. In addition, the Vermont Animal Cruelty Task Force was established. This state-wide coalition of private and governmental organizations works to prevent and respond to animal cruelty through communication, education, training, legislation and enforcement. Dr. Worth was honored for these achievements with the Massachusetts SPCA Veterinarian of the Year Award.

“I’m very pleased that our efforts led to a policy change that facilitates reporting of animal abuse by veterinarians in Vermont by offering them protection from lawsuits and other repercussions,” she said.

Dr. Worth’s other professional activities include serving as president of the Society for Veterinary Medical Ethics and chairing the National Council for Pet Population Study and Policy, a group of representatives from 12 animal-related organizations—including the Humane Society of the United States and the ASPCA—who work together on mutual goals regarding homeless pets.

In addition to her professional achievements, Dr. Worth and her husband take great pride in their two children, who are following in their footsteps. Their son, Bo, is graduating from veterinary school this year, and daughter, Sarah, works for the Center for Biologic Diversity in Tucson.

The couple recently expanded their practice facilities with a new clinic designed to further enhance quality of care. Although they converted their practice to companion animals a number of years ago, they still care for some llamas, the last vestige of their mixed practice. Concluded Dr. Worth, “I’ve always been grateful to be a veterinarian and work in my passion.”



Dr. Worth carries the Penn Vet banner for many great alumni who have served as president for AAHA including J.A. Millar, V28; Lester Barto, V30; Robert Ticehurst, V34; William Foster, V44; and Edward Lemos, V57. Michael Moyer, V90, past president of the Veterinary Medical Alumni Society and current Penn Vet Rosenthal Director of Shelter Animal Medicine, is in line to serve as president in 2011/2012.