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Alumni Profile: Cantner Family

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University of Pennsylvania

A Family's Passion

BY COREEN HAGGERTY

Recognizing that “every animal is attached to a person, and every person is an individual with a myriad of vested interests in this animal,” **Judy Shekmar, V’76** wanted to be a veterinarian.

After completing a biology degree at Rosemont College, she took a job with **Theodore V. Yuhas, V’56** first in Ardmore and later after the practice moved to become the Bryn Mawr Veterinary Hospital, in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. Her duties traversed all aspects of running a veterinary hospital from receptionist, surgical assistant, bookkeeper, as well as kennel duties and grooming

“People thought I was crazy for pursuing veterinary medicine when my girlfriends were becoming mothers, nurses and teachers,” she said. “Dr. Yuhas would take me to Penn’s Veterinary Hospital whenever possible for me to watch and learn. **Lilian Giuliani, V’57** also was a huge influence for me at that time.”

Steven Cantner, V’76, conversely, attended Lafayette College and found a path to research first.

“A lot of veterinarians I know knew they wanted to be a vet. I had the desire a bit, growing up in a rural area. I was intrigued by everything around me. College originally swept me up in research, but I soon found it narrow and it bored me. Luckily, Penn has always had a philosophy of fostering a variety of interests.”

One of those interests was Judy, and in the fall of 1972 both Judy and Steve began their professional journey at Penn Vet, and they also found love and each other.

Creating the Legacy

Judy and Steve married after graduation and in January 1979 welcomed the first of four daughters. They soon bought Bryn Mawr Veterinary Hospital and Judy recounts, “In those days, we just figured out what we wanted and did it. Becoming practice owners and parents simultaneously was monumental.”

“I remember that my sisters and I literally grew up in the hospital,” said Caroline, their first daughter. “We used to put stamps on the bills, clean the kennels and sit with the dogs after surgery – the hallway would be lined with dogs and daughters.”

Today, all of the Cantner children have benefited from their parents’ tenacity and enthusiasm. Second daughter Christine achieved a doctorate in psychology; third daughter Kathleen finished a master’s degree in oceanography; and fourth daughter Stephanie is pursuing a career in real estate. But it was first daughter Caroline that caught the veterinary bug.

The Winding Road

Originally, **Caroline Cantner, V11** studied government and sociology at Dartmouth, and planned a career in education policy or law. Caroline completed a two-year stint with AmeriCorps, and then also worked with a Pennsylvania state senator for several years – all while continuing working on the weekends at Bryn Mawr Veterinary Hospital.

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– Judy Shekmar, V’76



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Thinking that medicine might be a next step, she enrolled in the post-baccalaureate program at Bryn Mawr College. During this time, it was through volunteering at the Thorncroft Riding Center in Malvern, Pennsylvania that her parent's legacy of veterinary medicine came alive in her.

"The riding center reinforced the amazing interaction between animals and people," she said.


With the flexibility of Penn Vet's alternative track, Caroline applied to Penn Vet, her parents' alma mater. "What's great about the open (student) admissions is that people come from a variety of backgrounds and career tracks. Many have a lot of life experience."

Four years later, in May of 2011, Judy Shekmar, V'76 and Steven Cantner, V'76, presented their first daughter

with her diploma at Penn Vet's 2011 Commencement exercises and she joined them as a Veterinariae Medicinae Doctoris.

Having It All, Doing It All

Judy and Steve are immensely proud of the profession they found separately, and the life they found together.

Judy recounts, "Steve and I have had exceptional veterinary careers and have managed to combine our love of veterinary medicine with our love of children and family. We feel very loyal to Penn and proud of our education and the life-long relationships, which we established through veterinary medicine." 



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