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Changing the Lives of Native Americans, One Animal at a Time

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Changing the Lives of Native Americans, One Animal at a Time

BY DR. LAWRENCE GERSON, V'75

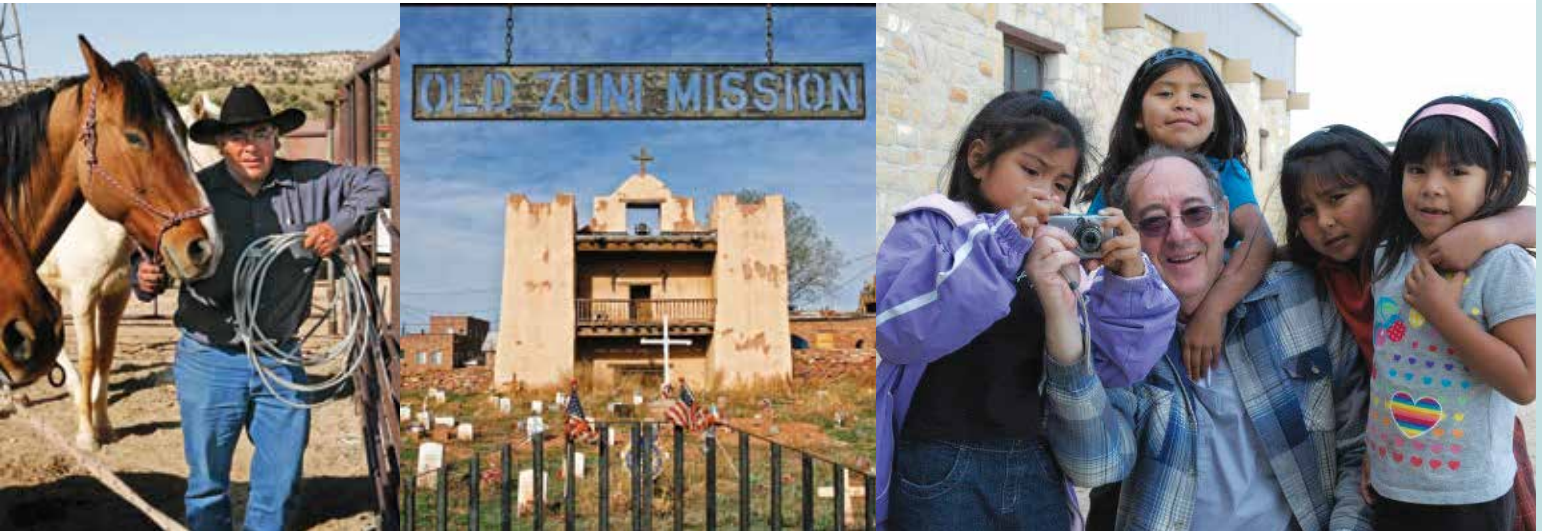
Many of our graduates contribute to academics and research in the veterinary profession. Others are on the front line providing clinical care to a variety of species. Some Penn Vet alumni contribute financially to annual giving, the Pet Memorial Program, and our Opportunity Scholarship Program.

Dr. Ted Robinson, V'74, leads our profession in an outstanding way, showing a true commitment to continuing education. Having been a lifelong leader in the Bucks-Montgomery Veterinary Medical Association, Dr. Robinson has proven his dedication to the profession through action. He has been involved in the Delaware Valley Academy of Veterinary Medicine since its inception, and currently serves on the Board of Directors, bringing additional veterinary education on a wide variety of topics to southeastern Pennsylvania. Dr. Robinson also is the organizer of the Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical Association's (PVMA) Winter Seminar, where he and his wife, Leni, lead a group of travelers to destinations in the Caribbean and other vacation locations for a week of continuing education and relaxation.

In addition to these accomplishments, Dr. Robinson organizes two trips each year to Native American Indian reservations in the southwest. The trips are part of the Pennsylvania Veterinary Foundation's animal welfare initiative called Native American Veterinary Services (NAVS). Since creating the program 12 years ago, Dr. Robinson has provided free veterinary care to the animals of a population without access to proper and affordable care. The trips are considered by many veterinarians, technicians, and students to be life-changing, and the bonds created among the participants last a lifetime.

Created in 2001, NAVS has grown from a few volunteers who visit one reservation to a dedicated team that visits multiple reservations for one to two weeks every spring and fall. Each October and April, a team comprising veterinarians, veterinary technicians, students, and support staff donate their time and skills to help the people and animals of the Hopi, Zuni, Kayenta, and Santo Domingo reservations in Arizona and New Mexico.

During each visit, temporary clinics are established to vaccinate, perform examinations, treat injuries, and spay and neuter domestic animals and pets. Mobile



veterinarians visit farms and ranches where thousands of farm animals, including horses, cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs receive health checks and vaccinations, and are treated for internal and external parasites. All of this is provided at no cost to the people of the reservation.

Through this unique program, Penn Vet students have the opportunity to see firsthand how Native Americans live, as well as learn about their culture. Through participation in the program, students gain an appreciation for helping to change lives of the human population, one animal at a time. Since the NAVS program began, both the pet population and farm animals have benefited. By treating the animals and providing basic education to owners, there have been noticeable changes in the health of reservation animals. Many dogs and cats have been spayed and neutered, helping to control animal

overpopulation, and the standard of living on the reservations has improved with healthier animals bringing a higher price for livestock.

Brittany Watson, VMD, went on the NAVS trip as a Penn Vet student. "I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to work with the veterinarians involved in the program, and even more privileged to have interacted with the people and animals of the reservation. This is a program that inspires you and leaves you wanting to be a part of its future."

As we all know, veterinary medicine is not just about animals. Thanks to Dr. Ted Robinson, the people on the reservations benefit from and appreciate the help that Native American Veterinary Services provides. Both they and the participants are changed forever on this most important mission. 🍷

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