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In Memoriam: Dr. Midge Leitch

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Dr. Midge Leitch

in memoriam

Dr. Midge Leitch
2/27/46 – 2/15/14

The veterinary profession lost one of its luminaries on February 15 when Dr. Midge Leitch lost her valiant battle with cancer. Dr. Leitch was in the vanguard of women entering veterinary medicine and one of the first to do a surgical residency at Penn Vet's New Bolton Center after graduating from the School in 1973. She was one of the first women equine practitioners to become board-certified by the American College of Veterinary Surgeons, achieving that distinction in 1982. In 1988, she was given Penn Vet's Alumni Award of Merit.

Following four years as a member of New Bolton Center's surgical staff, Dr. Leitch went into private practice. She established herself as an extraordinarily gifted general practitioner and equine veterinary consultant. Her practice covered a variety of disciplines, including show jumping, dressage, combined driving, three-day eventing, endurance, and racing. Dr. Leitch served as an official veterinarian to the US Equestrian Team, providing skilled services to elite equine athletes in Poland, Sweden, Austria, Italy, Hungary, Canada, and Spain. She was in attendance at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996 and the Sydney Olympics in 2000, when the US won a gold medal in eventing. Dr. Leitch also provided veterinary support at a number of renowned national events, such as the Devon Horse Show, the Washington International Horse Show, the Radnor Three Day Event, Fairhill Three Day Event, and Dressage at Devon.

Dr. Leitch was an active member of the American Association of Equine Practitioners for more than 40 years. In 2008, she was honored with its President's Award, and in 2012, the AAEP Distinguished Service Award. During her career she gave more than 60 invited lectures and papers, and contributed more than 40 publications to a wide variety of professional journals and books.

From 1996 until 2006, Dr. Leitch held the position of Adjunct Assistant Professor of Surgery at New Bolton Center. From 2005 until 2011, she was Staff Veterinarian in the Section of Sports Medicine and Imaging, teaching students, caring for patients, and sharing her vast knowledge with everyone with whom she came into contact.

Dr. Leitch – born on February 27, 1946 – lived in Cochranville, PA. She earned her undergraduate degree from Goucher College in 1968.

In addition to her remarkable professional career, Dr. Leitch was a devoted alumna, supporting a variety of initiatives at Penn Vet. She cared deeply about helping students, in particular through the Opportunity Scholarship program. Her community and civic activities included involvement with the Southern Chester County Soccer Association; Londonderry Township, where she served as a supervisor for several years; Canine Partners for Life; and The Seeing Eye, for which she served as a puppy-raiser until her death.

Dr. Dean Richardson, Chief of New Bolton Center's Section of Surgery, a close friend and colleague of Dr. Leitch's for many years, said of her, "There is simply no way to overstate how much Midge meant to me and so many others. When I arrived at New Bolton Center in 1979, she was an absolute dynamo, and she never really slowed down during her brilliant career. It was a boon

“Midge was brilliant. She had that unique combination of book-smarts and street-smarts, with impeccable judgment. If you were wise, you would seek her advice, and if you were *really* wise, you would follow it. She was always a fierce advocate for those she cared for and respected. There was no one more loyal to friends and to New Bolton Center staff members than Midge. For these reasons, and many others, her passing leaves a huge void in this community.”

to our hospital and the School when she agreed to oversee our radiology service. To have someone with her decades of experience and hard-won knowledge right here for students, residents, and faculty was an incredible gift. An amazing, paradoxical combination of a steely-eyed realist and a soft-hearted animal lover...a hard-driving, critical drill sergeant of an instructor and a caring, giving teacher...an intensely ethical practitioner with a ‘get them to the ring’ practicality. There were so many things about Midge that made her different than most people. For those who knew her well, she was sometimes hard as hell to like and even easier to love. She was absolutely one of a kind and will be terribly missed.”

Dr. Corinne Sweeney, Associate Dean and Executive Director of New Bolton Center’s large-animal hospital, offered this tribute: “Midge was brilliant. She had that unique combination of book-smarts and street-smarts, with impeccable judgment. If you were wise, you would seek her advice, and if you were *really* wise, you would follow it. She was always a fierce advocate

for those she cared for and respected. There was no one more loyal to friends and to New Bolton Center staff members than Midge. For these reasons, and many others, her passing leaves a huge void in this community.”

Penn Vet Dean Joan Hendricks said: “Midge was a major influence on my veterinary student training, and again was important to me when I became Dean. Honest, frank, insightful, smart, and willing to still be a friend even when she disagreed. Her time here was far too short, but she gave her friends – including the many four-legged ones – intense loyalty, affection, and care.”

Dr. Leitch was known as a passionate and caring individual, with forthright opinions and a well-developed sense of humor. Her gifts not only to veterinary medicine, but also to her community, family, and friends are legion. She will indeed be very greatly missed.