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Dr. Darcie Stolz

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Dr. Darcie Stolz

Penn Vet Class of 1982

"In my class of 103 students, I was the only woman who wanted to focus on bovine medicine."



As the commencement speaker for Penn Vet's Class of 2009, Dr. Darcie Stolz left the graduating class with this inspiring thought: "If a girl from the suburbs, who knew nothing about agriculture, could end up being the first woman food animal practice owner in the heart of dairy country in Pennsylvania, you can do anything."

Stolz exemplifies perseverance. Both her high school guidance counselor and college advisor strongly discouraged her from pursuing veterinary medicine as a career. But she steadfastly followed her calling. "I loved animals ever since I was a little girl," she said.

As an undergraduate at Penn State, Stolz had every intention of becoming a small animal vet. But she volunteered at the sheep barn during lambing season, and that changed everything. Large animal medicine "was just a whole new world. I really liked the people and being outdoors. The lifestyle seemed to fit me."

With signature stick-to-itiveness, she applied twice to Penn Vet before being accepted on her third try. "I graduated in 1982, at a time when women were still in the minority, and women interested in large animals were few and far between," Stolz noted. "In fact, in my class of 103 students, I was the only woman who wanted to focus on bovine medicine."

While she found supportive mentors at Penn Vet, going out into the workplace was a different story. Many large animal practices would not even grant her an interview. She finally found a job working in a two-person large animal practice in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. "I was very fortunate that once I did get hired, [my boss] was a good mentor and helped me get my feet on the ground," Stolz said.

She also had to earn the trust of the local Amish population. "My big break was when I saved the Amish bishop's cow from death. That catapulted my career within the Amish community," Stolz said. "I initiated preventative herd health programs, beginning with scheduled herd checks."

In 1989, Stolz purchased the dairy, beef, and small ruminant portion of the practice, and she has had a thriving business since. "You've got to build up that 'trust account' like a bank account," she said, adding, "As a woman, it took longer and you had to work harder." She credits her husband for his unwavering support. The demands of juggling practice ownership with raising children "take a spouse who is behind you 100 percent."

Stolz is the Production Animal Practice Veterinarian At-Large representative to the Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical Association Board of Trustees, and she served on the American Association of Bovine Practitioners Board of Directors for six years. She presented the talk *Families, Females and Food Animals: Can We Do It All?* at the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges' annual meeting. And she considers speaking at the Penn Vet commencement "one of the highlights of my career."

All of this might seem impossible to a girl discouraged from pursuing a passion for veterinary medicine. But as Stolz noted in that commencement address, "Remember that even the most unlikely goals can be accomplished. I am living proof of that."