

Vet Pet Program at Ronald McDonald House

Just two blocks from the School is a very special place, the Ronald McDonald House at 3925 Chestnut Street. This "house that love built" is a home away from home for the many families with children with life-threatening illnesses who come to Philadelphia's Children's Hospital for in- or outpatient treatment. The concept of providing a home-like atmosphere for the families and youngsters during treatment sessions began with the Philadelphia house. Now there are 120 such houses nationwide, a number in Canada, Australia and Europe.

Staffed by volunteers, the Philadelphia house can accommodate up to 19 families. About two-and-a-half years ago Nicole Pirkey (Class of 1990) approached the house with the idea of having students and their pets visit the children and their families at the house. At first the house manager allowed only dogs, but by the third visit she told the students they could bring "any animal that fit through the front door."

"The 'Vet Pet Program,' as it is affectionately known by the Ronald McDonald staff, is an informal educational experience," said Nicole Pirkey.

"We bring animals of all types who we determine to be calm enough and friendly enough to visit. These range from all kinds of exotic pets (snakes, guinea pigs, pet rats, birds) to dogs with special talents or ones that are especially large, small, cute, etc. All animals are screened carefully and require a recent negative stool specimen, current vaccination status, and a flea bath the day of the visit. We must be very careful because the immune status of many of these children is compromised. Subsequently, we do not bring cats or kittens (for fear of toxoplasmosis exposure) or any species of exotics that are known to harbor sub-clinical diseases that are potential zoonoses."

The student volunteers try to make the children and parents laugh, teach them something about animals and encourage them to touch, hold and play with different types of animals. This requires the student to observe the child and animal at all times to make sure there is no poking of eyes, pulling of tails, etc. The youngsters learn about the animals present, sing



songs and find out about veterinarians and what they do. "It's incredibly rewarding for everyone (students and children) but at times it can be unexpectedly sad," explained Ms. Pirkey. "One little girl, happily playing with a puppy, was telling me about her younger brother who was in the hospital now for the fifth time very ill with leukemia. She mentioned that she wished her little brother could be with her because he loved puppies so. She then suddenly became very serious and asked, 'Are there puppies in heaven?' This was after we had a talk about veterinari-

ans and I remember thinking that maybe she considered me to be the expert figure on the subject. So I replied, 'Yes, I really think there are.' That memory will stay with me for a long time."

The Ronald McDonald House staff is enthusiastic about the 'Vet Pet Program.' "It's always a great night," said Linda Ogilvie, house manager. "The majority of families come from small towns where pets are part of life. Having the animals and students visit provides a home-like comfort. I remember one little girl who cuddled a puppy all evening. She was scheduled for a procedure the next morning and the warm, soft pup gave her comfort."

"I think it is so very important for veterinarians and veterinary students to be aware of how much joy a puppy brings a child or how fascinating it is to touch a snake for the first time and feel how cool and smooth its skin is," said Nicole Pirkey.

Ms. Pirkey will graduate next year but she is confident that the 'Vet Pet Program' is well established and will be one of the student outreach projects for many years to come.

SCAVMA Report

The University of Pennsylvania SCAVMA chapter was very busy during the spring semester and looks forward to an even busier fall. Approximately 90 students were able to attend the SCAVMA symposium in March at the University of North Carolina Veterinary School. Although we didn't capture any titles in the Bovine Palpation Contest, the Equine Aging Contest, or the volleyball tournament, everyone had a great time attending wet labs, a variety of lectures and of course, some fun parties! SCAVMA fundraising activities raised most of the cost for the trip, reducing the student expenses to about \$10 each for the four day weekend.

Although our fundraising activities have come to a close this year, it was a very successful year indeed. At the December Auction, SCAVMA raised \$10,000 to contribute to the Faculty SCAVMA Emergency Fund. A \$2,000 donation from this Fund made possible reduced student tickets for the Teaching Awards Dinner Dance. Through the Penn Conference Raffle, T-Shirts, and hoagie sales we raised about \$9,000 total which, in addition to paying for the Symposium, allowed us to send out 2 delegates to the AVMA convention in Orlando, Florida for 4 days.

Finally, SCAVMA will be co-sponsoring the traditional "Pink Flamingo" end of the year party with student government and Alpha Psi.

Plans for the fall include welcoming activities for the first year students, a Zoo Symposium day for all students and faculty on October 21, 1989, SCAVMA sponsored CPR courses, and new T-Shirt designs!! We will also be expanding our hoagie fundraising sales to include sandwiches, and prepaid hoagie deliveries for faculty and busy hospital staff. In addition, we are considering printing buttons or keychains to expand our T-Shirt sales. If you have a good slogan idea, don't hesitate to let SCAVMA know!

The following were elected as SCAVMA officers for 1989-90 school year:

President	Leslie Ziemer
Vice-Presidents	John McCauley Scott Perkins
Secretary	Patty Hoyatt
Treasurer	Dina Rovere
Hoagies	John McCauley
T-Shirts	Scott Perkins Maureen Hargaden Lillian Aronson



The UpJohn Company presented a check in the amount of \$1,000 to the School's Student Chapter of the American Veterinary Medical Association. From left to right, standing: Chris Cochran, Dr. Bruce Beacham, UpJohn

Company, Dean Andrews, Dr. Gall Smith, SCAVMA faculty advisor, seated: Phil Goffey, UpJohn Company, and Leslie Ziemer, SCAVMA president.