

On the wall of the hospital at New Bolton Center hangs a plaque honoring Dr. Jill Beech. Her photo caption reads: "Recipient of 2011 AAEP Educator of the Year Award. 39 years as Revered Clinician, Teacher and Scholar, 1972 – 2011."

In light of her distinguished career, it can be hard to imagine Dr. Beech once feeling out of place at New Bolton Center. "Now, there are more women out here than men. Back then, you were a real minority. I might be the only woman in my group of 12 students in a rotation. And certain clinicians would avoid doing anything with you if you were a woman," she recalled.

After undergraduate years at UC Davis, Beech arrived at Penn Vet having never been to Philadelphia. She is candid in her recollections of those years. Some clients and trainers did not want a woman to look at their animals. And there were fewer drugs available to tranquilize large animals—so, as a woman, you "really had to rely on guile and intelligence," she said.

She persevered and found allies at Penn Vet, including Drs. Al Merritt, William Boucher, and Charles Raker. She recalled a now-legendary story about Raker bringing her and two other female interns to the yearly meeting of the American Association of Equine Practitioners: "Dr. Raker was a very highly regarded figure within the organization. He would greet his colleagues and say, 'I want you to meet my interns,' and they would immediately look past us, looking for guys. Dr. Raker would say, 'No, *these* are my interns!' The three of us thought he took some delight in doing so!"

Another mentor was Dr. Robert Whitlock, who she said "really encouraged women and helped them with their research." Coincidentally, in 2010, Beech received the Robert Whitlock Award, presented to the faculty member who demonstrates the most dedication to mentoring young faculty.

Beech served as an instructor of large animal medicine at Penn Vet starting in 1976; received the title of Professor in 1993; and was named the Georgia and Phillip Hofmann Chair in Medicine and Equine Reproduction in 2001. She promoted the clinical services of ophthalmology and neurology at New Bolton Center, and later focused her research on equine pituitary disease and muscle dysfunction. She has published numerous papers in refereed journals, and she has edited and contributed to major equine medicine textbooks. She retired from Penn Vet in July 2011.

In honoring Beech with a distinguished educator award, the American Association of Equine Practitioners noted that she "propelled the careers of countless leaders in the equine veterinary profession." For Beech, paving the way for others has been just as important as forging her own path.

"I worked hard and no doubt jostled some people along the way. Even though there were few of us at that time, I think it is important to remember that there were other women who preceded me in equine veterinary medicine. One always stands on someone else's shoulders," she said.



Dr. Jill Beech

Penn Vet Class of 1972

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