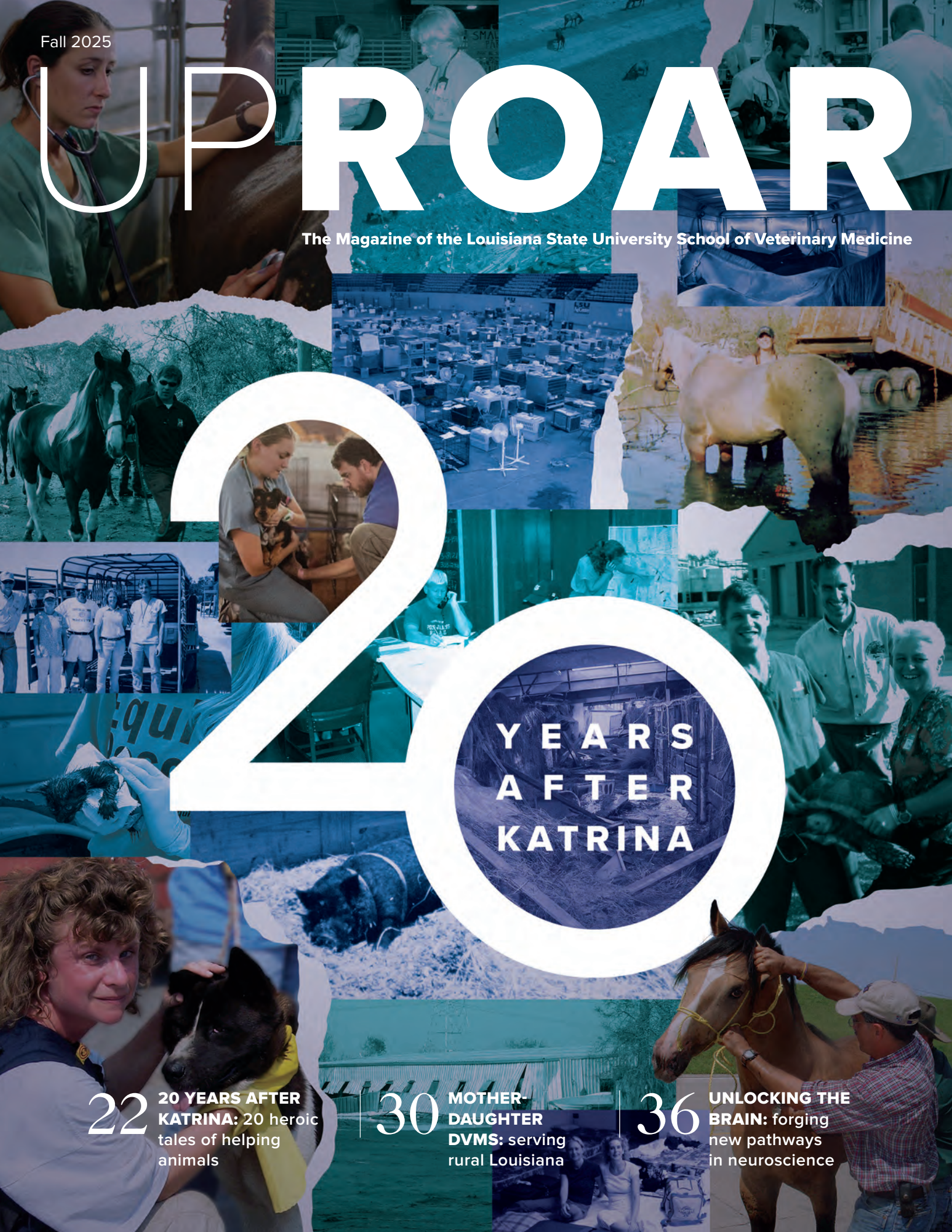
Fall 2025

UPROAR

The Magazine of the Louisiana State University School of Veterinary Medicine



Fall
2025

in this issue

ON THE COVER Hurricane Katrina was a watershed moment that changed how the U.S. handles animals in disasters. It led to the Pet Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act (PETS Act), better disaster planning, wider use of microchipping, and stronger coordination among agencies—ultimately making emergency responses more humane for pets and the people who love them.

ON THIS PAGE Alumnus Neil Henderson stops to help a stray dog during his rescue efforts centered in St. Bernard Parish. Photos of the Hurricane Katrina retrospective were provided by those involved in animal rescue.

LSU
School of Veterinary Medicine

features

administration

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UPROAR magazine

Sandra Sarr
Editor

Natalie Kaiser
Class Notes Editor

Ginger Guttner
Contributing Writer

Tamara Mizell
Proofreader

STUN Strategic Creatives
Graphic Design

Chris Jones
Photography

Mele Printing
Printing

School of Veterinary Medicine
Skip Bertman Drive
Baton Rouge, LA 70803

Veterinary Teaching Hospital
Pets and small exotics:
225-578-9600
Horses and farm animals:
225-578-9500
Dean's Office:
225-578-9900
Fax:
225-578-9916
vetmed@lsu.edu

TAKING THE STAGE 20 YEARS APART
Karrington Hall, Class of 2029, and Gretchen Delcambre, DVM (LSU 2009), assistant dean for student outreach and veterinary admissions, share a moment at the LSU Vet Med Blue Coat Ceremony, marking the moment that celebrates the beginning of the veterinary student journey—all of the hard work it took to get here and all of the successes to come.

A Message from the Dean

OLIVER GARDEN
BVetMed, PhD, FHEA, FCPP, FRCVS, DACVIM, DECVIM-CA

Built to succeed for Louisiana and the world

At LSU Vet Med, student success is at the heart of everything we do. Whether preparing to enter clinical practice with a DVM or advancing discovery through an MS or PhD, we are committed to providing every student with the edge to succeed academically and launch a meaningful career that will better animal and human lives across Louisiana and the world.

Our DVM curriculum emphasizes hands-on experience integrated with classroom learning to prepare graduates to start their careers with confidence. The competency-based, systems-aligned curriculum has four streams across all three years: clinical skills, foundational and clinical sciences, evidence-based veterinary medicine, and veterinary professional development. Multimodal, state-of-the-art preclinical and clinical teaching takes place in world-class learning spaces. The clinical skills stream focuses on procedural and surgical skills, foundational and clinical sciences on acquisition of knowledge, evidence-based veterinary medicine on clinical reasoning and information literacy, and veterinary professional development on professionalism, ethics, communication, collaboration, and business management. The curriculum continuously builds on skills previously learned and allows for targeted pathways—such as food animal medicine, One Health, or equine practice—that prepare students to meet workforce needs in specific areas, including rural and underserved communities.

For our MS and PhD students, the path looks different but is no less ambitious. Graduate study means balancing research demands, professional development, and preparation for careers in academia, industry, public health, and beyond. Our programs are designed to cultivate strong scientific skills while also fostering leadership, communication, and the resilience needed to thrive in competitive career pathways. We focus on core scientific concepts across the new curriculum to ensure uniformity in our graduate education program. In parallel, we are expanding our graduate student administrative office to provide a more robust student experience while designing targeted recruiting that will attract a national applicant pool.

Across all degrees, success is never a solo endeavor. That is why we are launching the LSU Vet Med Mentorship Platform. This initiative connects students with experienced mentors who provide career clarity, real-world guidance, and support for personal growth and balance. Whether navigating the challenges of veterinary training or doctoral research, students benefit from mentors who have walked the same path and are ready to help them move forward with confidence.

We are fully invested in our students' success. When they go on to achieve a stellar career and a fulfilling life, that's when we know we have succeeded too. We are one community, one LSU Vet Med—both now and well into the future.

With my warmest wishes to you all,

news briefs

Blood donor cats: vital heroes of the LSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital

BY NATALIE KAISER

Onyx aged out of the blood donor program about two years ago and, since then, has been enjoying his retirement. "Onyx is such a sweet boy," said Cortez. "He loves to play fetch with anything that crinkles into a ball, he loves rolling around in the grass, and he's such a big talker too! He'll just walk around the house all night talking."

NEARLY EVERY HOSPITAL IN the U.S. has a blood bank available for humans in need. Blood banks also play a crucial role in saving the lives of animals. At the LSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital, a robust blood donation program ensures that every patient gets the care they need. At the center of the feline program are three current blood donor cats, Tiger, Leo, and Pete, who live at the school and play a vital role in making life-saving treatments possible.

"Every pet deserves a chance to be saved, and having blood on hand can mean the difference between life and loss for someone's best friend," said Amber Cortez, former veterinary technician at LSU Vet Med. Cortez's 10-year-old black cat, Onyx, is retired from the hospital's blood donor program, donating blood until he hit the age limit of 8 years old.

Just like humans, cats have different blood types, ranging from the more common types, A and B, to the rare type AB. When cats come to LSU Vet Med suffering from conditions such as severe anemia, trauma-induced blood loss, Feline Infectious Peritonitis, and others, they have a lifeline, a robust blood bank supported by 13 cats.

Tiger, Leo, and Pete are three of those 13 cats in LSU Vet Med's blood donation program. They act as safeguards and are especially valuable due to the high emergency case load at the hospital.

"As a veterinary technician who has used the blood and plasma products for emergency and critical situations, I have personally seen many lives saved," said Andi LaBorde, former veterinary technician at LSU Vet Med. "A blood donor program is so important in a veterinary hospital that sees emergency, critical care, and specialty surgical cases."

Although blood can be bought from outside blood banks, it is costly and not consistently available in the quantities required. Animal blood has a short shelf life as well, making the need for immediate action even more important. Having a live-in donor program helps reliably maintain the blood bank that is crucial for a veterinary teaching hospital.

"Ordering blood takes time, even if it's shipped overnight," LaBorde said. "Having access to an in-house donor or being able to call in a donor to keep inventory full is so important." Cats aren't the only animals contributing to LSU Vet Med's blood bank. The hospital also runs a canine blood donor program made up of 11 dogs. That program is open exclusively to LSU Vet Med faculty, staff, and students who volunteer their pets to help save lives.

The live-in cat donors reside within the new Stephenson Pet Clinic in a cozy habitat spanning two rooms with two large windows complete with window perches, blankets, toys, and kennels. Members of the Community Practice service take care of them and ensure they live a comfortable life. The cats only donate blood about three times per year, as needed, for their two years of service at the hospital.

"Our live-in cats' needs are of the utmost importance to Community Practice," said Torri Collins-Cannon, a veterinary technician who oversees the blood donor program along with Associate Professor of Community Practice Nancy Welborn, DVM.

Under an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee

Gretchen Morgan adopted Party Marty, a live-in donor, in 2020. She said he was given the name as he "likes to party." Every time someone would walk through the door, he'd come immediately to greet them. He continues this tradition in his retirement, greeting everyone who walks through Morgan's front door.

Former Veterinary Technician, Andi LaBorde, poses with LSU Vet Med's most prominent blood donor, Willie Nelson. Not pictured is LaBorde's other retired donor, Herb, who was not camera ready.

(IACUC) protocol, LSU follows specific rules regarding who can handle and interact with the cats to ensure their safety and comfort. Even with these rules, the live-in donors get plenty of attention. Walking down the hallway, you can often see a staff member or a student in the hospital interacting with them.

After the live-in donors fulfill their two years of service at the hospital or reach the age limit of 8 years old, they are all adopted, usually by LSU Vet Med faculty or students. The word is spread around the hospital and school, and anyone who would like to adopt a retired donor must fill out an application.

"We have a 100% adoption rate," Dr. Welborn said. "We know their personalities and what would work well, so we do talk to potential adoptees to make sure that the cat's retirement is to a place that is a good fit because they have done a really important job for us."

Over the years, hundreds of cats have passed through LSU Vet Med's blood donor program, each of them playing their own important role at the hospital. As a former technician in the hospital, LaBorde not only interacted with them professionally, but she also welcomed two of them into her home permanently.

In 2013, LaBorde adopted Willie Nelson as a kitten, and as soon as he became old enough to become a blood donor, she enrolled him. She recalls being told one day by Ophthalmology Technician Leigh Ann Burton that Willie Nelson's blood had been used in an emergency transfusion for her mother's cat, saving its life. From 2014-20, Willie Nelson donated blood, becoming one of the hospital's most frequent donors.

In 2017, LaBorde also adopted Herb, a retired live-in blood donor at the hospital, as a companion for her cat, Willie Nelson. A brown tabby like Willie, Herb reminded LaBorde of him, so she decided to bring him home. Now retired, both cats live with LaBorde and have become close friends.

Party Marty was a live-in blood donor during 2018-19. Senior Director of Alumni Relations Gretchen Morgan adopted him in 2020, and he now lives out his retirement with her.

As they approach the two-year limit, Tiger, Leo, and Pete will soon be adopted out and join Onyx, Herb, Party Marty, and Willie Nelson in retirement, officially becoming the newest retired blood donor heroes of the LSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital.

LSU Vet Med honors every blood donor animal that has contributed to the program, along with their generous owners who have volunteered their time to help save countless lives.

An architectural rendering of a new Wildlife Hospital of Louisiana shows the building's planned design and positioning on the LSU Vet Med campus.

Planned expansion for Wildlife Hospital of Louisiana aims to bolster education, conservation, protection, and outreach

EVERY YEAR, THOUSANDS OF INJURED wild animals across Louisiana depend on the LSU School of Veterinary Medicine's Wildlife Hospital for lifesaving medical care. From raptors struck by vehicles to turtles tangled in fishing lines, the hospital treats approximately 1,400 cases annually, with a release rate of about 73% for treatable patients. The goal is always the same: to heal, rehabilitate, and return these animals to their natural habitats.

But the need has far outgrown the space. The Wildlife Hospital of Louisiana is currently confined to a mere 350 square feet inside the LSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital. With few upgrades in more than four decades, the facility is stretched far beyond its limits.

"By the end of July 2025, we had already surpassed the number of injured wildlife cases presented in 2024, a more than 40% increase in caseload," explained Dr. Mark Mitchell, professor of zoological medicine and head of the Wildlife Hospital. "The new Wildlife Hospital of Louisiana will provide us much-needed space to meet the growing demands of injured wildlife in Louisiana."

Plans are in progress for a new, stand-alone Wildlife Hospital of Louisiana—an ambitious project that represents a momentous step forward in LSU Vet Med's history. Designed to reflect LSU's position at the forefront of wildlife healthcare and conservation medicine worldwide, the new facility will not only expand medical capacity but also enhance education, research, conservation, protection, and community outreach.

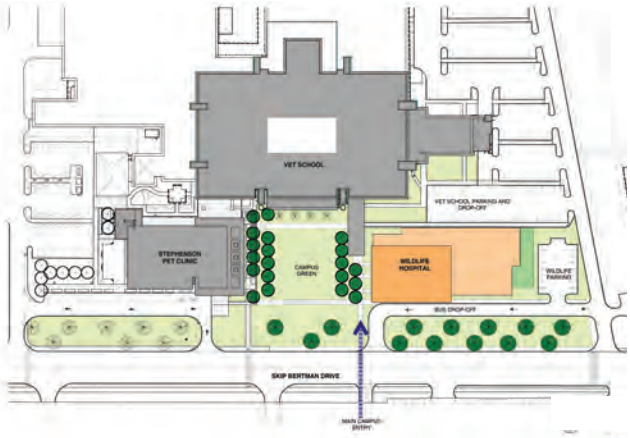
The planned Wildlife Hospital will include induction and recovery rooms; operating suites; ICU wards; a radiology suite with advanced diagnostic imaging; species-specific areas for mammals, reptiles, raptors, and waterfowl; a clinical research laboratory; an auditorium; and classrooms for public education. Visitors will be able to engage with interactive exhibits, while students and professionals will benefit from conference and rounds rooms, offices, and dedicated teaching spaces.

"This building will allow us to bring school children to our facility. It will give us the capacity to take care of all species of wildlife," Dr. Mitchell said. "Right now, we're limited in what we can take because of our small size. With conservation and protection, we help with screening for diseases. For example, we identified several cases of West Nile Virus in birds before it was even detected in mosquitoes. With the new hospital, we could test every bird, in house, and use it to train our students."

The educational impact is significant. The facility will host Louisiana high school and college students, offering interdisciplinary opportunities that incorporate veterinary medicine.

"We want to give students a chance to apply biology, math, chemistry, physiology, and other academic areas in a real-world setting," Dr. Mitchell said.

"With a living animal, I can show them how nutrition, case management, and calculating doses work together. In addition, biological engineering students could design and 3D-print a plate that goes into an injured bald eagle. Future doctors can experience surgery firsthand. Students from different backgrounds will teach and mentor one another. This can be a powerful recruiting



tool to keep Louisiana's brightest students here."

The Wildlife Hospital will also serve as a center for One Health research, connecting animal health with environmental and human health. Through conservation science, disease surveillance, and public education, LSU Vet Med envisions the hospital as a hub for protecting Louisiana's most treasured resource—its wildlife. The impact for Louisiana will be profound.

"This new facility will expand our capacity not only to provide medical and surgical services for injured wildlife but also to train students at every level, from high school to graduate school," Dr. Mitchell said. "Our goal is to incorporate education, conservation, and protection on a scale we've never had before."

Now in the fundraising stage, the Wildlife Hospital of Louisiana represents more than a new building. It is a commitment to the state's wildlife, a dedication to education and innovation, and a promise to future generations. With support, LSU Vet Med is poised to set a new global standard in wildlife care—right here in Louisiana.

Those who are interested in knowing more about the Wildlife Hospital initiative may contact Tracy Evans, MPA, executive director of development, LSU Foundation, at **tevans@lsufoundation.org.**

Hannah Porter: Choosing the path less traveled

BY THOMAS ROONEY

WHILE MANY STUDENTS MARCH through classrooms, clinics, and research labs on their way to a veterinary degree, Hannah Porter chooses to chart an even tougher course—balancing those demands with the added responsibility of a military commission. Porter, Class of 2028, recently joined the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps as a second lieutenant under the Army's F. Edward Hebert Armed Forces Health Professions Scholarship Program (HPSP), one of the most comprehensive scholarships available to aspiring healthcare professionals.

Porter's journey is shaped by six years of service as a military police officer in the National Guard. She deployed to Eastern Europe and logged more than 2,000 hours providing force protection and base security in cooperation with NATO allies. That experience gave her both a global perspective and the discipline to navigate the rigors of veterinary school.

"What many people do not realize is that military life emphasizes resilience and adaptability, traits that definitely carry over to veterinary medicine," Porter said. "The military also instills confidence in how you communicate and present yourself, skills that are invaluable when working with clients, colleagues, and the public."

Through the HPSP, Porter receives full tuition support and a monthly stipend—an opportunity that not only lightens the financial burden of professional education but also opens doors to a unique career path. Army veterinarians care for military working dogs, safeguard the nation's food supply, support public health, and provide care for service members' pets around the world. Yet for many students, the military remains an underexplored option in veterinary medicine. Porter's story demonstrates how service can expand professional horizons while offering meaningful contributions to both animal and human health.

"The military has given me a sense of purpose and teamwork that I carry into every part of my life. Now I'm able to combine that with my passion for veterinary medicine," she said.

At LSU Vet Med, Porter is already a standout. She serves on the boards of multiple student organizations, including Dental, Lab Animal Medicine, Surgery, Students for One Health, Theriogenology, and the Women's Development Initiative clubs. She is a Form and Function Leader, guiding first-year students through foundational principles of anatomy. She received the LSU Vet Med Lab Animal Medicine Fellowship along with the Kenneth F. Burns Scholarship that recognizes her work with teaching animals at LSU. She is active in volunteer work, reflecting her commitment to service both in and out of uniform.

Married to a military recruiter stationed in Baton Rouge, Porter's life embodies the balance of dedication to family, community, and country. Her path shows future veterinarians that the military can be more than a call to service—it can be a rewarding and supportive career path, one that strengthens both veterinary medicine and national security.

WE HEAL

Jeaux

JEAUX, THE DOG, WAS DIAGNOSED

with pneumonia and was having difficulty breathing. LSU Vet Med's Critical Care team inserted bilateral chest tubes to remove excess fluid and improve lung function. When a follow-up chest CT showed pockets of trapped fluid inside his lung, Jeaux underwent multiple procedures. Fluid pockets, severe adhesions, and diseased lung and mediastinal tissues were carefully removed. Within days, Jeaux's fluid production significantly decreased, allowing for the removal of his chest tubes. With his breathing stable and energy returning, he went home the following day. "Jeaux has recovered very well. He is a very happy boy, and he acts like a puppy now," his owner said.

Bubbie

BUBBIE, AN 8-MONTH-OLD CAT,

came to LSU Vet Med when she began showing signs of stumbling, lethargy, and decreased appetite. Upon presentation to the LSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital, the Ophthalmology team noted numerous neurological signs, leading to a consultation with LSU Vet Med's Neurology team, who discovered Bubbie had feline infectious peritonitis (FIP)—specifically the neurological and ophthalmic form.

FIP was once considered a death sentence for cats. Thankfully, Bubbie's condition coincided with a critical advancement in veterinary medicine—the anti-viral GS-441524 was finally widely available, enabling life-saving care. Bubbie began a course of the medication, along with dorzolamide and prednisolone acetate for her ocular symptoms. After just a few days of inpatient care, Bubbie showed signs of neurological improvement and was able to go home. While her ocular lesions appeared to be chronic and likely permanent, her overall prognosis was determined to be very good, with a relapse rate of less than one percent. Thanks to this collaborative approach and the trust placed in our Neurology and Ophthalmology teams, Bubbie's future looks bright.

Link

LINK, A 2.5-YEAR-OLD PIT BULL MIX,

first arrived at LSU's Dermatology, Ear, and Allergy Service because he had ulcerative lesions on his paws, pinnae (outer ear), and oral cavity. Skin biopsy and histopathology allowed our dermatology experts to determine that Link was struggling with erythema multiforme, a skin disorder caused by the body's own immune system. Link also had elevated liver enzymes, requiring a careful and strategic approach to his treatment. Dermatology consulted with the Small Animal Internal Medicine Service, ensuring a comprehensive approach to his care. Link's care team implemented a multifaceted treatment strategy including changes in diet, shampoo, and flea medication, along with multiple medicinal therapies to stop the introduction of secondary infections and to address Link's liver function. Within weeks, Link's owner reported that he was noticeably happier, more energetic, and enjoying an increased appetite, all thanks to the collaboration of LSU's Dermatology, Ear, and Allergy Service and Small Animal Internal Medicine.

Gidget

GIDGET, A 9-YEAR-OLD DOG,

landed in our Emergency Service in pain with suspected intervertebral disc herniation. She exhibited compulsive circling to the right and a moderate right head turn. On cranial nerve examination by our Neurology team, Gidget had central blindness and had trouble standing. After identifying these neurological deficits, an MRI of the brain was performed by Diagnostic Imaging to further investigate the cause of Gidget's symptoms. A spinal tap was performed which confirmed a diagnosis of bacterial meningoencephalomyelitis, a serious bacterial infection of the brain and spinal cord. Gidget was treated with a combination of steroid medication in addition to what we call our "Neuro Trio" of drugs. She slowly improved over the week and became brighter, ambulatory, and her cranial nerve deficits disappeared. While the prognosis of bacterial meningoencephalomyelitis is generally guarded, Gidget beat the odds with the help of her LSU Vet Med care team.

TACO, A 4-POUND CHIHUAHUA WHO LIVES

near Lafayette, La., came to us after surviving a serious dog attack near his home. He arrived in critical condition with chest and abdominal injuries, requiring immediate blood transfusions and emergency surgery.

Thanks to the incredible teamwork across our hospital—starting in ER with Dr. Hailey Penticoff, stabilization by our Critical Care team (Drs. Tomoe Kadowaki and Nancy Mitropoulou), surgery with Dr. Nimar Gill, anesthesia by Dr. Jeannette Cremer and team, and post-op care from Critical Care (Drs. Karla Fraga and Piyachat Saengsawang) along with our dedicated ICU nurses including Beth and Lacy—Taco pulled through.

Surgery involved extensive chest repair, rib removal, and the loss of one kidney, but Taco never gave up. He went home to continue his recovery with his family.

JESSE, AN INDOOR CAT, WAS ATTACKED BY A

dog when he escaped his home—leaving him with facial nerve paralysis. Things looked grim. His owner, Sara, was told he would likely lose his eye, since he could no longer blink or make tears. But hope came in the form of two acupuncture treatments from Dr. Kielyn Scott in our Integrative Medicine service. Incredibly, Jesse began to blink again. Then he started to produce tears. Today, Jesse is back to his old self—bright-eyed and thriving. Sara says the teams in Community Practice, Integrative Medicine, and Neurology treated Jesse like one of their own. “I knew he was in good hands. He is doing great.”

CASH, THE DOG, WAS DIAGNOSED WITH DIABETES

in February causing him to become extremely sick. “The stress of the traditional routine—feeding, then giving the shot twice a day, 12 hours apart—was overwhelming,” said his owner, Kelly. During the summer, Kelly brought Cash from Little Rock, Ark., to LSU Vet Med to see Dr. Patty Lathan, an endocrinology specialist. Dr. Lathan switched him to insulin degludec, a human insulin that’s often effective in dogs with just one daily dose.

To monitor Cash’s glucose, the team, including Dr. Jisoo Hong in Small Animal Internal Medicine, used the Freestyle Libre, a continuous glucose monitor designed for humans but increasingly valuable for dogs. “Kelly could tell us how Cash was doing with each dose adjustment. It sounds like he’s back to his old self!” Dr. Lathan said.

“His quality of life is so much better—and so is ours,” Kelly shared. “His turnaround has been nothing short of amazing. Cash is once again the bouncy, wildly playful dog he was before diabetes. We all have our lives back.”

FIRECRACKER, THE GOAT, CAME TO LSU VET

Med’s large animal emergency service in April suffering from goat ketosis or pregnancy toxemia, a condition most often affecting female goats in the last few weeks of pregnancy. It can be extremely dangerous for both the goat and the kids she’s carrying.

Dr. Clare Scully, assistant professor of food animal health maintenance, performed a cesarean section as it was Firecracker’s best chance at survival. To everyone’s delight, Firecracker gave birth to three healthy kids. Firecracker and her offspring are back home with their loving owners, healthy and safe.

“A lot of times you lose the babies, sometimes you lose the mom, very often you lose both which is why we are very happy they are all doing well,” Dr. Scully said.


Taco


Jesse

JOE THEISMANN, THE GOAT,

came into LSU Vet Med’s Food Animal service in April with a fractured tibia. He was struggling to walk. Joe was first treated by Dr. Clare Scully, associate professor of food animal maintenance. Surgery on Joe’s tibia was performed by Dr. Charles McCauley, associate professor of equine surgery. Next, Joe received rehabilitation from LSU’s Integrative Medicine service with Dr. Kielyn Scott, assistant professor of integrative medicine. After rehabilitation with underwater treadmill sessions by veterinary technician Jennifer Bridges and at-home physical therapy, Joe Theismann was finally able to run, jump, and take on goats bigger than him again, his owner said.

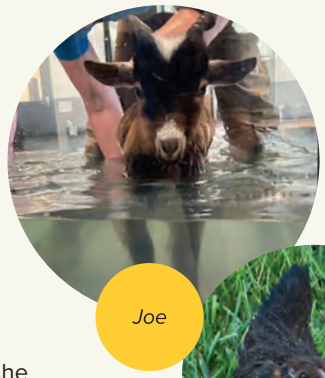

Cash

Firecracker

HAWK, THE CHICKEN,

was only 10 months old when her owner Dr. Melissa Blazevich, assistant professor of veterinary dentistry and oral surgery, brought her into the Exotics service at LSU Vet Med. Hawk was unable to walk, losing balance often. Eventually, she was completely paralyzed. Both the Exotics and Neurology teams decided that Hawk’s best chance was acupuncture treatment, in addition to other medical therapies. After two acupuncture treatments by Dr. Kielyn Scott, assistant professor of integrative medicine, Hawk began recovering quickly. After just one week, Hawk was able to walk again and was even perching in the coop.

“She now has made a total recovery and is a normal, happy chicken,” Dr. Blazevich said. “What a blessing it is to have so many smart minds to work with and to have the ability to consult with so many services at LSU.”


Joe


Hawk

Freedom from addiction: Finding new treatments for devastating challenges

Watch Dr. Ethan Anderson and Dean Oliver Garden in conversation on 3Q with Oliver

Dr. Ethan Anderson's research zeroes in on the brain's reward center, a structure called the nucleus accumbens. He studies how addiction reshapes this region, rewiring it to crave substances like alcohol or opioids. By seeking ways to reverse those changes, Anderson is working to discover therapies that could one day free those trapped in the cycle of dependence. Dr. Anderson, assistant professor in the Department of Comparative Biomedical Sciences, is focused on a molecular intervention which would reduce drug-seeking and drug-taking behaviors. With a new $2 million R01 grant from the National Institute on Alcohol and Alcohol Abuse (NIAAA), the Anderson Lab will be studying how epigenetic regulation in the nucleus accumbens alters alcohol drinking behavior. Dr. Anderson shares key aspects of his research.

ADDICTION DESTROYS LIVES. One in 10 people have cravings for drugs or alcohol that they can't control. What happens in the brain when a person struggles with addiction is complicated. A lot of these substances over time rewire the brain through neuroplastic mechanisms, and they can lead to fundamental changes in the way that the nervous system reacts to stimuli. We understand some of the important brain areas involved in things like craving, but we don't really know the fundamental molecular mechanisms that are responsible. More importantly, we don't really know how to treat those things yet.

Drugs of abuse act on the body's endogenous reward system. We have a reward system that is supposed to be able to respond to cues for things that we want. While you do want responses to cues for naturally rewarding things like water, good food, and companionship, drugs of abuse can take over this system, essentially hijacking it. Drug craving is similar to ravenous hunger or super intense thirst. So, evolutionarily, you want to go to things that are going to satiate your hunger and thirst cravings.

People have been using mind-altering substances for thousands and thousands of years. The diagnosis of addiction itself is a rather newer concept though. People have been studying the biggest problems first. For instance, based on findings from past scientific research, we can do things to bring somebody back from an overdose. We can also help to wean people off substances. But what we're still left with today is craving. We still don't quite understand how that works and how exactly to reduce those high levels of craving in people. We're trying to take that next step to understand exactly what is changing in the brain in these reward-related regions.

Everyone knows people who suffer from addiction. I have members of my family—and I have known many people growing up—that have unfortunately had very difficult times with addiction. Being able to see those things firsthand initially made me very concerned, but also incredibly curious about how those things work. I originally planned to be a medical doctor and possibly go into psychiatry, but then as I learned more about the problem, I realized there was this big gap. We really can't treat things like cravings. That led me to this path, where I'd like to think that, in 10 years or so, we may have therapeutics that we can bring to the market to help treat people, control cravings, and get them back to a more normal life.

Kassandra Crissman is the 2025 Nandi Theriogenology Scholarship winner

Dr. Kassandra Crissman is with Dr. Clare Scully, who nominated her for the prestigious scholarship.

LSU SCHOOL OF VETERINARY Medicine 2025 graduate Dr. Kassandra Crissman has won one of the most competitive scholarships in veterinary reproductive medicine, the 2025 Nandi Theriogenology Scholarship.

Awarded annually by the Theriogenology Foundation, the Nandi Scholarship recognizes only four veterinary students nationwide who demonstrate exceptional potential for clinical and scholarly excellence, as well as leadership in theriogenology, a specialized branch of veterinary medicine focused on animal reproduction.

Dr. Crissman is the second LSU student to receive the honor. Dr. Kalie Beckers won in 2024. She is a small animal rotating intern at Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine.

"The Nandi Scholarship supplements my salary. As an undergraduate, I worked in the Dr. Jennifer Sones Lab. It gave me research experience, which helped me pursue my veterinary education," Dr. Crissman said.

She graduated with a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine in May 2025.

Dr. Clare Scully, associate professor of food animal health maintenance at LSU, nominated Dr. Crissman for the scholarship. She also received recommendations from Dr. Jenny Sones, at Colorado State University, and Dr. Viviane Gomes, at Michigan State University.

"Drs. Scully, Sones, and Gomes were mentors of mine at LSU, and without them none of this would have been possible," Dr. Crissman said.

"Kassie is an exceptional individual whose academic, professional, and personal qualities consistently demonstrate a remarkable level of scholarship, dedication, and leadership potential. Throughout her time at LSU, she has shown an unwavering commitment to veterinary medicine, particularly in the field of theriogenology, where her research and clinical work have consistently exceeded expectations," said Dr. Scully.

Dr. Crissman has presented her research at national symposia and has been recognized for her ability to convey complex scientific concepts clearly and effectively.

Dr. Crissman received an award of $7,500 and was recognized at the Society of Theriogenology's annual Therio Conference in July 2025. She was a 2023 Foundation for Food and Agricultural Research Veterinary Student Research Fellow and was a 2022 Summer Scholar.

"My goal is to ultimately be a well-rounded veterinarian prior to any specialization. Ultimately my goal is to become a theriogenologist," Dr. Crissman said.

Dr. Rob Simpson teaching professional development skills to veterinary students at LSU Vet Med.

Expanding professional skills to prepare students for veterinary practice

VETERINARY SKILLS INSTRUCTION TRADITIONALLY involves teaching hands-on, medical aspects of veterinary practice such as diagnosing illnesses, performing surgery, administering treatments, interpreting lab results, and more. LSU School of Veterinary Medicine is expanding skills offered to better prepare students for veterinary practice. In 2024, Rob Simpson, DVM, JD, assistant professor and director of professional development education, began teaching veterinary students professional skills, such as practice management, financial literacy, professional development, and regulatory and legal compliance.

"We are developing leaders. When I was in veterinary school, we didn't have a professional skills program. It took years to develop the skills necessary to manage a team and deal with clients," Dr. Simpson said.

At LSU Vet Med, the focus is to create Day 1-ready veterinarians. Year 1 students begin to learn communication skills and resume writing. Year 2 students learn spectrum-of-care (offering clients a range of options), medical records, ethical decision making, and advanced communications, including how to share difficult news. Year 3 students learn about controlled substances policies, jurisprudence matters—such as legal standards for issues like licensing, malpractice, veterinarian-client-patient relationship, and animal cruelty—contract law, Board complaints, negotiating, and interviewing skills.

"Seeing our students grow is the most enjoyable part of my job. It's pretty magical. I'm proud that what we're doing with veterinary student preparation is working. Our students come from such different backgrounds. Some arrive directly from undergraduate programs and others have had two or three careers before entering vet school," he said.

The Communications Lab curriculum is expanded to over 30 hours of instruction. Labs are team taught. An exciting cross-disciplinary collaboration with the LSU School of Theater, launched in September 2025, trains theater students to play the role of veterinary clinic clients in simulated client workshops where veterinary students learn to communicate with clients. Theater students receive course credit by enrolling in a fourth-year undergraduate elective course.

"Not many other veterinary schools offer our level of professional skills program. Much of what we do is derived from human medicine with techniques that began decades ago," he said.

Specializing in both veterinary medicine and law, Dr. Simpson's influence on professional development education extends to a national level. For the second time, he is serving as the president of the American Veterinary Medical Law Association (AVMLA) board. The AVMLA is an educational nonprofit organization dedicated to providing resources on the legal and business aspects of veterinary medicine for professionals in both the veterinary and legal fields with a mission to enhance the understanding and application of veterinary law through education and collaboration.

"During my first term, I ensured that students received free membership, and I plan to continue this initiative through outreach efforts. Veterinary students need to become proficient in all aspects of veterinary medicine, and that includes the ability to do business with and explain things to the general public," he said.

Harnessing AI to make expert-level ear diagnostics widely accessible

IN THE LABORATORY (NAVDLAB) of Neoklis Apostolopoulos, DVM, DECVD, EBVS, artificial intelligence (AI) is utilized to develop a proof-of-concept model capable of distinguishing healthy canine ear canals, ear masses, and otitis from video-otoscopic images, offering a promising way to close a diagnostic gap.

Otitis externa—ear canal inflammation—is one of the most common reasons dogs visit a veterinarian. It causes discomfort, pain, and, if untreated, can lead to hearing loss. Accurate diagnosis typically requires an otoscopic examination, yet surveys show that nearly half of cases are initially misdiagnosed in general practice compared with specialist evaluation by veterinary dermatologists.

Already widely used in human medicine, AI can be successfully adapted for veterinary applications. Within AI, the field of computer vision focuses on extracting meaningful information from images and videos to make informed recommendations. It can analyze veterinary images and identify patterns that a trained specialist would recognize.

Until recently, no such models existed in small animal dermatology. Unlike many AI projects in medicine, NAVDLab not only develops applied AI models but also thoroughly tests and validates them to ensure reliability, clinical relevance, and real-world performance before deployment. This rigorous evaluation process addresses a common gap in both human and veterinary AI research, where models are often published without sufficient validation in diverse clinical settings.

Building on this foundation, the team is now creating an expanded AI-powered diagnostic tool for canine ear disease. The new model will classify ear canals into one of five clinically relevant categories. Crucially, the dataset is curated by a board-certified veterinary dermatologist, ensuring gold-standard annotations for every image. This expert oversight is essential for producing a clinically relevant and reliable model.

Once trained, the AI model could serve as a diagnostic support tool for veterinarians and veterinary nurses worldwide, including those working in shelters or underserved areas. A practitioner could use a digital otoscope to capture an image and receive an instant AI-generated assessment. This capability would enable earlier diagnoses, improve evaluation consistency, and reduce missed cases.

The model will also serve as a powerful educational resource for training veterinarians, technicians, and students in otoscopy. By comparing their own assessments with AI output, users will receive immediate feedback, reinforcing learning in both in-person and remote training environments.

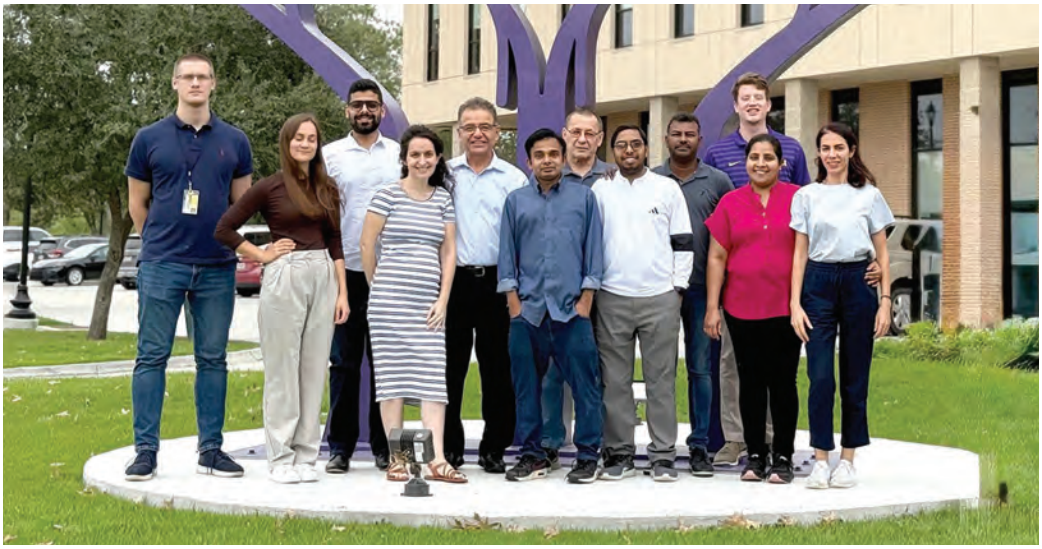
The project aims to make expert-level diagnostic interpretation more widely accessible. By bridging the gap between primary care and specialist evaluation, this tool has the potential to improve animal welfare, reduce disparities in care, and support continuing professional development in veterinary medicine.

This work represents a novel intersection of veterinary dermatology, otology, and artificial intelligence. The vision is for an AI-augmented diagnostic ecosystem that complements—not replaces—veterinary clinical judgment, enhances training for students and practitioners, and supports research into the epidemiology and management of ear disease in dogs.

$20.3 million renewal strengthens Louisiana Biomedical Research Network

IN JULY 2025, THE LOUISIANA Biomedical Research Network (LBRN), administered by the Division of Biotechnology & Molecular Medicine (BioMMED) at the LSU School of Veterinary Medicine, was awarded a five-year, $20.3 million renewal grant from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). In a competitive federal funding environment, the award marks a significant achievement for LSU Vet Med and its statewide partners.

The grant underscores the strength of LBRN's track record and its value as a catalyst for biomedical discovery in Louisiana. The program has, since 2001, expanded research capacity across the state—supporting faculty development, student training, and infrastructure upgrades at both research universities and primarily undergraduate institutions.



Team BioMMED during the March 2025 BioMMED Retreat at LSU Vet Med designed to reflect on research milestones, new projects, and the power of collaboration.

The network brings together Louisiana's research-intensive universities—including LSU (Baton Rouge), LSU Health (New Orleans), LSU Health (Shreveport), Tulane University, and Pennington Biomedical Research Center—while also linking an extensive array of primarily undergraduate institutions and community colleges across the state. This collaborative structure connects scientists at every level of Louisiana's higher education system, enabling faculty and students alike to pursue research while sharing expertise and resources.

"This renewed investment allows us to deepen our commitment to supporting researchers and students across Louisiana while launching new initiatives in areas like artificial intelligence, data science, and interdisciplinary research," said Dr. Gus Kousoulas, director of BioMMED and professor of pathobiological sciences at LSU Vet Med.

The renewal is also bolstered by $1.91 million in matching support from institutional partners: $1.2 million from the Louisiana Board of Regents; $100,000 each from Pennington Biomedical Research Center, LSU Health (New Orleans), LSU Health (Shreveport), and Tulane University; and $30,000 each from seven primarily undergraduate institutions. LSU Vet Med added nearly $100,000, bringing total program support over the next five years to more than $22.2 million.

One of the most visible outcomes will be the LBRN Training Platform, developed in collaboration with BioMMED. This new resource integrates virtual learning, AI and machine-learning modules, and collaborative tools to expand biomedical research education statewide.

"I am thrilled that we are the administrative hub of the Louisiana Biomedical Research Network under Dr. Gus Kousoulas' talented leadership," said Dr. Oliver Garden, dean of LSU Vet Med. "Our scientists are making groundbreaking advances in lung health and disease, neuroscience, cancer, infectious disease, and veterinary clinical science. We build teams that win for Louisiana and the world."

With renewed NIH funding secured amid tight competition, LBRN reinforces LSU Vet Med's role as a statewide hub for biomedical discovery and workforce development across Louisiana's higher-education system.

Information about the Louisiana Biomedical Research Network, including details on participating institutions, training opportunities, research highlights, and upcoming events, is available at **lbrn.lsu.edu.**

Known as @dogtorhibz on social media, Ali knew she wanted to be a veterinarian when she saw a three-legged dog at her local animal shelter growing up in south Florida. While she didn't know what was wrong, she wanted to fix it. "That's when I realized I wanted to be a doctor, but not for people," she said.

Hiba Ali: Using her platform to inspire, educate, and break barriers in veterinary medicine

BY NATALIE KAISER

WHEN HIBA ALI BEGAN posting videos of herself with lion cubs and primates while volunteering at a small zoo in Miami, she never expected anything to come of it. But when one of her videos garnered millions of views, she knew she had to use her newly formed platform for good. Now, she posts educational content for future veterinary students on both her TikTok and Instagram accounts with a combined audience of more than 200,000.

"At first, I didn't know what to do with it," Ali said. "Then I realized I had the opportunity to educate pre-vet students and other minorities that want to be in the field. I decided to take the opportunity and run with it."

As a Pakistani Muslim woman, Ali recalls growing up never seeing veterinarians who looked like her. Even today she struggles to find fellow students or colleagues who look like her. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, approximately 8% of U.S. veterinary graduates in 2024 were Asian.

"Even within that 8% of Asian veterinary professionals, it's mostly East Asians. South Asians probably make up less than 1%. It's scary. I'm really proud to be a part of that percentage and just make a difference," she said.

Ali is now the role model she lacked as a child—a South Asian woman pursuing a career in veterinary medicine.

"I've had people in the South Asian community direct message me and tell me that what I am doing is amazing," she said. "It's really important to me to provide something for others that I did not have."

Ali believes that it's crucial to have diversity within the veterinary field not just for other veterinary professionals, but for the clients they serve.

"I've encountered clients who don't speak English, and I am the only one who can communicate with them," she said.

A second-year student with an interest in zoological medicine, Ali said she picked LSU Vet Med specifically for the zoological medicine and wildlife programs. Her passion for zoo med was confirmed for her during her time as a zookeeper at Zoological Wildlife Foundation.

"It's really interesting to be able to work with species you don't see on a daily basis," Ali said. "You look into their eyes and it's not the same as looking at a domestic cat. This animal knows it can kill you, but it's not."

While she worked at Zoological Wildlife Foundation, Ali also worked as a tour guide, educating the public on the animals, their origins, and their endangerment status. Her experience as a tour guide inspired her to focus on conservation.

"I realized that people were really listening to me and caring about what I had to say," she said. "It made me think that if I could just get more people to listen and care, then maybe we can change the future for these endangered animals."

With plans to graduate with her DVM in 2028, Ali hopes to work with primates with a focus on conservation after her graduation, volunteering her talents at nonprofits when she has the time. Until then, she'll continue educating, advocating, and building a more inclusive future for veterinary medicine.

PIPPIN FRISBIE-CALDER, our fourth artist-in-residence at LSU Vet Med, is pictured on the first day of her residency. An acclaimed visual artist and educator known for her interdisciplinary work at the intersection of art and science, she was in residence from Aug. 4-29, and engaged with the clinical, research, and academic environment to create original artworks inspired by her experience. Her residency culminated in a public exhibition and presentation on Nov. 10 in the LSU Vet Med Library.

Where anatomy meets technology: Dr. Alexander Lee brings solutions to life

HOW CAN 3D PRINTING transform veterinary medicine and education? For Dr. Alexander Lee, LSU Vet Med's newest assistant professor of anatomy, the answer lies in using engineering and biomechanics to create solutions that benefit both patients and students. From developing prosthetics that restore mobility in animals to building interactive teaching tools that bring complex anatomy to life, Dr. Lee's work demonstrates how technology can expand what is possible in veterinary care and training.

Dr. Lee's research emphasizes the development of anatomically accurate, 3D-printed models and devices. These innovations have the potential to make prosthetics more functional, comfortable, and accessible while also offering novel classroom applications. His doctoral dissertation, "Development of a Tensegrity Based 3D Printable Transradial Canine Prosthetic," highlights one of his most distinctive projects: creating canine prosthetics designed for both strength and flexibility.

Dr. Alexander Lee

Current projects include refining prosthetic designs through tensegrity principles and exploring ways to optimize devices using advanced 3D printing. Dr. Lee also collaborates with clinicians to apply visualization technologies in practice—producing precise anatomical models, supporting surgical planning, and aiding in medical device development. These efforts align closely with LSU Vet Med's mission to advance both veterinary education and biomedical discovery.

"My goal is to push the boundaries of how we use technology. Whether it's designing prosthetics that enhance the lives of animals and humans or developing tools that empower students, I want this work to ignite innovation, inspire confidence, and have a meaningful impact across classrooms, labs, and clinics," Dr. Lee said.

Dr. Lee earned his bachelor's degree from LSU in 2017 and his PhD in 2024. A New Orleans native, he joined the LSU Vet Med faculty in January 2025.

"MY GOAL IS TO PUSH THE BOUNDARIES OF HOW WE USE TECHNOLOGY. WHETHER IT'S DESIGNING PROSTHETICS THAT ENHANCE THE LIVES OF ANIMALS AND HUMANS OR DEVELOPING TOOLS THAT EMPOWER STUDENTS, I WANT THIS WORK TO IGNITE INNOVATION, INSPIRE CONFIDENCE, AND HAVE A MEANINGFUL IMPACT ACROSS CLASSROOMS, LABS, AND CLINICS."

Cindy Berry retires after more than 30 years of service

AFTER MORE THAN 30 years of service, Cindy Berry retired from her role as a medical technologist in our Clinical Pathology Service. Cindy was hired in 1989 to work on research with Steve Gaunt, DVM (LSU 1977), DACVP. She remained at LSU Vet Med through May 1998 and returned to LSU Vet Med in the fall of 2003 in Clinical Pathology. Cindy has helped shape and strengthen LSU Vet Med through her work in diagnostic testing and has supported countless patients and clinicians.

This summer, LSU hosted 25 of Africa's emerging Civic Engagement leaders for a six-week Leadership Institute. As part of this partnership, LSU Vet Med welcomed the fellows for a tour, showcasing the impact of veterinary medicine. Since 2014, the Mandela Washington Fellowship, the flagship program of the Young African Leaders Initiative, has brought nearly 7,800 young leaders from countries in Sub-Saharan Africa to the United States for academic and leadership training.

Pictured, from left: Dr. Michael St. Blanc, Associate Dean Britta Leise, Dr. Mark Mitchell, Dr. Tricia Adams, Dr. Michelle Osborn, Dr. Alexander Lee, Associate Dean Tammy Dugas, and Dean Oliver Garden at the commencement ceremony for graduate students at LSU Vet Med in December 2024.

Celebrating excellence at LSU Vet Med

AT LSU VET MED, excellence in research, education, and clinical care shines across disciplines—and the past few months have brought an extraordinary wave of accomplishments by our faculty, students, alumni, and staff.

Mariano Carossino, DVM, PhD, and **M. Ryan Smith**, DVM (LSU 2009), DACVECC, were both promoted to associate professor with tenure. Dr. Carossino is an associate professor of veterinary pathology in Pathobiological Sciences, and Dr. Smith is an associate professor of veterinary emergency and critical care in Veterinary Clinical Sciences.

Chris Jones, LSU Vet Med videographer, won top honors for his roles of producer, editor, and actor with the hit indie comedy, "The Candy Lady," during the Women's Comedy Film Festival Atlanta on March 16. Chris regularly brings his visual storytelling prowess to LSU Vet Med, delivering imagery illustrating our teaching, healing, discovering, and protecting missions.

Alexa Boudreaux, logistics and events manager, is pictured with colleagues and LSU Staff Senate President Olivia Hope.

William Beavers, PhD, associate professor of pathobiological sciences, received the LSU Alumni Association Rising Faculty Research Award for his groundbreaking work on Staphylococcus aureus, a major cause of life-threatening infections. With over 900,000 severe cases annually in the U.S.—10% of which involve antibiotic-resistant strains—his research focuses on how the body fights Staphylococcus aureus and how the bacteria evade treatment. By uncovering its weaknesses, Dr. Beavers is helping to shape the future of infectious disease treatment.

Dustin Brewster, senior dean's coordinator, received the LSU Staff Senate Support Scholarship, which offers financial assistance to staff members who are in active pursuit of a degree from the main campus, recognizing that furthering one's education can positively enhance the professional development, skills, and career longevity of the staff. Dustin is pursuing his master's degree in Leadership and Human Resource Development.

Alexa Boudreaux, logistics and events manager, has received the LSU Staff Stripes Award, presented by the LSU Staff Senate in recognition of her outstanding service to the university. This award celebrates LSU staff who go above and beyond in their roles, and recipients are nominated by faculty and staff colleagues across campus.

Ginger Guttner, APR, has been promoted to assistant director of communications. Ginger also serves as an adjunct professor at LSU's Manship School of Mass Communication and was recently honored with the inaugural Outstanding Adjunct Teaching Award from the Manship School.

Sandra Sarr, MFA, communications manager, was a featured presenter at the Louisiana Book Festival reading with other published poets from The Poetry Buffet: An Anthology of New Orleans Poetry published by New Orleans Poetry Journal Press. She also was selected to present a multimedia poetry reading at Le Bleu Perdu, a research project and symposium organized by Atelier de la Nature to explore the lost art, science, and culture of Louisiana indigo, a

From top: Dustin Brewster, Bethany Eaton, Andrea Gisclair

symposium that resulted in an article published by the Mingei International Museum.

Bethany Eaton, Class of 2027 veterinary student and live-in at LSU Vet Med's Veterinary Teaching Hospital, earned the LSU Student Employee of the Year – Gold Award. Chosen from 65 nominees out of all student workers on the LSU campus, Bethany was recognized for her leadership, professionalism, initiative, and excellence. Only one Gold Award is given each year.

Ahmed Abdelmoneim, PhD, assistant professor of comparative biomedical sciences and clinical veterinary toxicologist, was lauded by the American Academy of Environmental Engineers & Scientists in its "40 Under 40" recognition program this year. His research focuses on understanding how environmental contaminants influence early neuroendocrine development, with a particular focus on their potential role as risk factors for the global rise in stress-related disorders such as anxiety and depression.

Antonieta Guerrero-Plata, PhD, associate professor in Pathobiological Sciences, was awarded a Laboratory Travel Grant from the American Association of Immunologists to attend the AAI2025. She will also participate as a table leader in the Career Roundtable and Networking Session at the AAI. Her PhD candidate, **Pius Babawale**, also participated in the meeting by presenting his work on the effects of age on the antiviral response to respiratory pneumoviruses. Pius was a recipient of a Hannelore and Johannes Storz Student Travel Award.

Kassandra Crissman, DVM (LSU 2025), was one of only four recipients nationwide of the 2025 Nandi Theriogenology Scholarship. This prestigious award recognizes veterinary students who show exceptional promise in reproductive medicine.

Tithipong Plangsangmas, DVM, and **Nadia Richmond**, DVM, DACVP, received MS degrees from LSU Vet Med in May 2025. Dr. Plangsangmas also published a research paper in collaboration with his wife, Dr. Pratthana (Pang) Inthawong, and colleagues from Thailand. Their study explores the use of ultrasound in evaluating internal organs in Asian elephants, which is an important advancement for both veterinary care of working elephants and conservation efforts. Dr. Richmond has joined the LSU Vet Med faculty as an assistant professor of clinical pathology.

Bonnie Boudreaux, DVM, DACVIM, senior associate dean for student success, has been honored by the Mississippi State University College of Veterinary Medicine as its 2025 Alumnus of the Year. This recognition highlights the lasting impact of her work across institutions and in the lives of those she serves.

Andrea Gisclair, PharmD, pharmacy manager, passed the International College of Veterinary Pharmacy boards, earning diplomate status.

Weishan Huang, PhD, associate professor of immunology in Pathobiological Sciences, has been appointed as an editorial board member for the Immunology & Infectious Disease section of Communications Biology, a leading open-access journal published by Nature Portfolio.

Alexandra Noël, PhD, associate professor in Comparative Biomedical Sciences, was awarded a grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to study how prenatal exposures to electronic nicotine delivery system (ENDS) aerosols containing metals can impact the neonatal pulmonary immune system to make the lungs vulnerable to allergic asthma.

From left: Drs. Konstantin "Gus" Kousoulas, head of Pathobiological Sciences; William Beavers, and Dean Oliver Garden at the reception honoring Dr. Beavers and others, as he received the LSU Alumni Association Rising Faculty Research Award.

From left: Drs. Tithipong Plangsangmas and Nadia Richmond receive their MS degrees alongside Dean Oliver Garden.

Outstanding achievements recognized at annual faculty and staff awards ceremony

From left: Drs. Matt Welborn, Heather Dean, Renee Carter, and Jeremy Delcambre receive Teaching Awards.

LSU SCHOOL OF VETERINARY Medicine celebrated the outstanding achievements of its faculty and staff during the annual awards ceremony in May 2025. The event recognized excellence in teaching, service, and clinical care, including the presentation of the Dean's Teacher Merit Honor Roll, Faculty and Staff Service Awards, House Officer of the Year honors, and the Service of the Year Award. These accolades highlight the dedication and impact of the LSU Vet Med community.

Patricia Queiroz-Williams, DVM, interim director and clinical lead for shared services in the LSU Vet Med Veterinary Teaching Hospital, and professor of anesthesia and analgesia, received the 2025 Faculty Service Award. An honorarium and inscribed plaque are presented to faculty members who, in the opinion of their fellow faculty, have made significant contributions to the service aspects of the School of Veterinary Medicine. Dr. Queiroz joined the LSU Vet Med faculty in 2007. **Torri Collins-Cannon**, veterinary technician, received the 2025 Veterinary Teaching Hospital Staff Service Award. An award is presented by the Year 4 class to a resident or intern in recognition of outstanding commitment to the Veterinary Teaching Hospital. This year, the VTH House Officer of the Year Award went to **Marley McInnis**, DVM, dermatology resident, and **Juneshine Park**, DVM, emergency and critical care intern. The Service of the Year Award went to Neurology, which is led by **Colleen Embersics**, DVM, DACVIM, assistant professor of neurology and neurosurgery. The School of Veterinary Medicine Teaching Award is presented to the faculty member nominated by each class for the Zoetis Animal Health Distinguished Teacher Award. This award is given to educators in recognition of their character, leadership qualities, and outstanding teaching abilities. Students in the Class of 2028 (Year 1) nominated **Jeremy Delcambre**, DVM (LSU 2009), assistant professor of veterinary anatomy in Comparative Biomedical Science, for the Year 1 Faculty Teaching Award. Dr. Delcambre received his DVM from LSU Vet Med in 2009 and joined the LSU Vet Med faculty in 2022 as assistant professor of anatomy. **Renee Carter**, DVM (LSU 2000), DACVO, professor of veterinary ophthalmology in Veterinary Clinical Sciences, received the Year 2 Faculty Teaching Award. Dr. Carter received her DVM in 2000 from LSU Vet Med and joined the faculty in 2016. **Heather Dean**, DVM, assistant professor of clinical skills in Veterinary Clinical Sciences, received the Year 3 Faculty Teaching Award. Dr. Dean received her DVM from the University of Georgia in 2008 and joined the LSU Vet Med faculty in 2023. The Class of 2025 (Year 4) nominated **Matt Welborn**, DVM (LSU 1987), MPH, DACPM, professor of food animal health maintenance for the Year 4 Faculty Teaching Award. Dr. Welborn is also a 2024 LSU Vet Med Distinguished Alumnus. The 2025 Zoetis Animal Health Teacher Award recipient is Dr. **Renee Carter**. As part of this honor, Dr. Carter carried the mace in the 2025 commencement ceremony. The following staff were recognized: **Qingxia Wang**, faculty support coordinator in the lab of Weishan Huang,

PhD, received the Pathobiological Sciences Staff Service Award; **Merilyn Jennings**, research associate in the lab of Tammy Dugas, PhD, received the Comparative Biomedical Sciences Staff Service Award; **Catherine Takawira**, clinical research manager/research associate in the Center for Clinical Innovation, received the Veterinary Clinical Sciences Staff Service Award; **Aneta Staszkiewicz**, research associate in histology, received the LSU Diagnostics Staff Service Award; **Stanley Vance**, security officer, received the Building Maintenance & Service Staff Award; and **Ginger Guttner**, assistant director of communications, received the Professional Services Staff Award and the Distinguished Staff Service Award; **Beth Grandt** received the Staff Organizational Health and Mentorship Award; and **Javier Nevarez**, DVM, PhD (LSU 2000, 2007), DECZM, professor of zoological medicine, received the Faculty Organizational Health and Mentorship Award.

Honoring endowed professors whose work impacts animal and human health every day

LSU VET MED HAS announced its newest recipients of prestigious five-year endowed professorships, appointments that support groundbreaking research, innovative teaching, and improved care for animals and people. These positions provide faculty with the resources to pursue discoveries that often translate into better diagnostics, treatments, and public health outcomes. These appointments are effective July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2030.

Shannon Dehghanpir, DVM, MS (LSU 2013, 2017), DACVP, associate professor of clinical pathology, received the Blanche Donaldson Professorship in the Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences, which supports a faculty member with a concentration of investigation in an aspect of small animal medicine or surgery.

Olalekan (Michael) Ogundele, PhD, associate professor in Comparative Biomedical Sciences, received the Dr. Mary Louise Martin Professorship, which was founded in memory of Dr. Mary Louise Martin (LSU 1982), who moved to Africa in 1995 and lost her life in the terrorist bombing of the U.S. embassy in Nairobi in 1998.

Charles Lee, PhD, professor of cognitive and neural systems, received the William L. Jenkins Professorship, which was established in honor of William L. Jenkins, professor emeritus of veterinary physiology and pharmacology, LSU Vet Med dean, LSU provost, LSU chancellor, and president emeritus for the LSU System. Dr. Jenkins served as the dean of LSU Vet Med from 1988 to 1993.

Renee Carter, DVM (LSU 2000), DACVO, professor of veterinary ophthalmology, received the Paula & Milton W. Shepherd Professorship in Veterinary Medicine, established in 1996, as the first endowed professorship.

Udeni Balasuriya, BVSc, BVSc, MSc, PhD, professor in Pathobiological Sciences, received the Dr. Robert and Julia Simmons Professorship in Pathobiological Sciences, which honors Dr. Robert “Bob” Simmons, a 1977 graduate of LSU Vet Med. Dr. Simmons spent most of his career in senior management in research and development at Merck Animal Health. He and his wife Julia established the Belle Fund in honor of their son’s dog to support vector-borne disease research in the Pathobiological Sciences Department.

New Faculty

KAUSTUBH DONGAONKAR, BVSc & AH, MVSc, MSc, DACVS, assistant professor of small animal surgery, joined the LSU Vet Med faculty on July 1, 2025. Dr. Dongaonkar is a Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and received his veterinary degree from Bombay Veterinary College in 2009. His clinical interests are in small animal orthopedics, fracture repair, joint replacement surgery, angular limb deformity correction, arthroscopy, minimally invasive surgery, and surgical oncology.

FRANCISCO MEDINA BAUTISTA, DVM, clinical instructor of anesthesiology, is an expert in pain management for horses and small animals with a focus on regional anesthesia techniques and evidence-based practice. He received his DVM from the University of Cordoba (Spain) in 2020.

SUBMIT NEWS

SANDRA SARR sarr1@lsu.edu

FEATURE

20 YEARS AFTER KATRINA

BY SANDRA SARR

Hurricane Katrina was a watershed moment that changed how the U.S. handles animals in disasters. It led to the Pet Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act (PETS Act), better disaster planning, wider use of microchipping, and stronger coordination among agencies—ultimately making emergency responses more humane for pets and the people who love them. This watershed moment also directly impacted LSU School of Veterinary Medicine, which performed a vital role in animal rescue, care, medical treatment, and reuniting animals with owners. Twenty years after the storm, we offer 20 LSU Vet Med vignettes from people describing what it was like when animals needed our help most.

Katrina's Wake: How a hurricane changed animal welfare

THE PET EVACUATION AND TRANSPORTATION STANDARDS ACT

The Pet Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act (PETS Act) is a federal law that was passed in 2006 shortly after Hurricane Katrina. Reports suggest that people were reluctant to evacuate without pets, and little planning was previously done for pet transport and sheltering in disasters. Now, for states, cities, and counties to receive federal funding for their disaster relief plans, those plans must "account for the needs of individuals with household pets and service animals before, during, and following a major disaster or emergency." Since then, more than 30 states have amended their disaster relief plans to account for the needs of companion animals and service animals. The Act allows the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to provide funding to states and localities for the creation, operation, and maintenance of pet-friendly emergency shelters, along with other emergency preparedness actions for companion and service animals. FEMA is also permitted to reimburse state and local governments for rescuing, caring for, and sheltering animals in an emergency.

PHILANTHROPIC CONTRIBUTIONS

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Emmet and Toni Stephenson made a gift to LSU of $25 million, which helped fund the Stephenson Disaster Management Institute to save lives of people and animals by continuously improving disaster management through leadership in applied research and executive education. The gift also included funding to help create LSU Vet Med's Stephenson Pet Clinic, a 40,000-square-foot facility that is home to our companion animal wellness efforts and many of our clinical services, including community practice (primary care), dermatology, integrative medicine, and ophthalmology. The clinic was built with a combination of major gifts, including one from Kenneth Windheim, state funds and $4 million in private funds from more than 300 individual donors, with the primary donors being Emmet and Toni Stephenson. When the Stephenson Pet Clinic opened in 2022, Emmet Stephenson said, "Toni and I greatly appreciate the excellent care that LSU Vet Med provides to sick and injured animals, and we respect the ground-breaking medical research performed by the faculty and doctoral candidates." The Stephensons first approached the School of Veterinary Medicine after Hurricane Katrina. They were watching a cable news program and saw a story about Best Friends Animal Society, which was one of many groups rescuing animals after the storm. The Stephensons decided to contact Best Friends to see how they could help. When they called the organization, a recording instructed them to contact Louisiana State University School of Veterinary Medicine. They did so and made a sizeable donation to the Spirit of Veterinary Medicine Hurricane Relief Fund.

LOUISIANA STATE ANIMAL RESPONSE TEAM

The Louisiana State Animal Response Team (LSART) was just being formed when Hurricane Katrina put it to the test. Dr. Renee Poirrier (LSU Vet Med Class of 1988), director, and Dr. Martha Littlefield, assistant state veterinarian (LSU Vet Med Class of 1982), managed rescue shelters, evacuation shelters, and credentialed rescue operations. LSART grew from there and has responded to hurricanes, floods, oil spills, and individual incidents. LSART also partners with other animal allies and strives to help create a more resilient community.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS BOOTCAMP AT LSU VET MED

Each year, LSART and LSU Vet Med join forces to offer hands-on training that strengthens disaster response skills for veterinary professionals, students, and emergency responders across Louisiana and other states, marking 15 years of collaboration in advancing disaster response education. Over the course of one week, participants engage in hands-on exercises and expert-led lectures on topics like pet evacuation, large and small animal decontamination, large animal rescue, and disaster preparedness. The boot camp is recognized as one of the nation's top veterinary disaster response programs.

POST-KATRINA EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT REFORM ACT OF 2006

Congress passed the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 which established the Federal Emergency Management Agency as a distinct agency within the Department of Homeland Security, defined FEMA's primary mission, and designated the FEMA administrator as the principal advisor to the President, the Homeland Security Council, and the Secretary of Homeland Security for all matters relating to emergency management in the United States.

WATCH A VIDEO released in 2015 describing LSU Vet Med's crucial efforts after Katrina.

20 YEARS AFTER KATRINA:
20 heroic tales of people helping animals

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JENNY SONES

(CLASS OF 2008), CSU EQUINE REPRODUCTION LABORATORY REPRODUCTION SPECIALIST

"School was cancelled, and electricity was out most places except at the vet school. My colleagues set up temporary housing in our study rooms and other places throughout the vet school. We then began to learn of the effects of Katrina on our veterinary species—dogs, cats, horses, and more. These precious creatures were the reason why we studied, crammed, and signed up to endure the rigors of veterinary school. It was time to close the books and help! We spent many hours doing anything we could to assist the heroic volunteer veterinarians working tirelessly to treat the injured, sick, and rescued."

READ MORE ABOUT 20 LSU VET MED VIGNETTES from people describing what it was like when animals needed our help most.

2

ASHLEY STOKES

(DVM 2001, PHD 2003), DEAN, UC DAVIS COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL & ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

"It was unlike anything I've ever experienced. I was researching and teaching at LSU Vet Med in 2005. LSU Vet Med stepped up in so many ways. We started receiving calls from citizens and local authorities at the vet school almost immediately after the storm. They had to leave New Orleans quickly and needed help with resources—animal rescue, food, and water. It was surreal to see the devastation, houses floating, there in the Delta. We were making real-time decisions to help their animals. They'd lost so much, and for some, their animals were all they had left."

3

RUSTIN MOORE

DEAN, OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE

"We worked around the clock, often planning missions into the early morning hours and deploying again at sunrise. There were horses and humans out there who, if we didn't act, might not get help in time. The scale of devastation was overwhelming—not just for the people but for the animals who were left behind. At the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center, we witnessed horses arrive dehydrated, injured, and frightened, yet still fighting to survive. What struck me most was how quickly a sense of hope returned when they were given food, water, and gentle care. The multi-agency sheltering operation now serves as a benchmark for coordinated animal care."

4

TORRI COLLINS

LSU VET MED VETERINARY TECHNICIAN

"I took a horse trailer on a rescue mission into New Orleans. Authorities let us through the barricades but kept rerouting us because of flooded roadways. The scene looked like a war zone, helicopters everywhere dropping baskets, fires, buildings burning, gunshot sounds. Looking down from the overpass, animal bodies floated in 8-10 feet of water. There were people on the overpasses who had been there for a week. We were there to rescue animals. We had to keep stopping because helicopters kept landing on the highways dropping off people from floodwaters and pallets of water onto overpasses. Authorities brought the animals to us on an overpass. We picked up a few strays on our way out."

5

LT. GEN. RUSSEL HONORÉ

COMMANDER OF THE JOINT TASK FORCE KATRINA

"On Aug. 31, 2005, President George W. Bush put me in charge of the Joint Task Force Katrina coordinating military relief efforts across the Gulf Coast. It was an integrated effort. Eighty percent of the city was under water. Our primary concern was getting people out. During our second search of homes, first responders and troops rescued animals. A cargo plane flew in catching poles, cages, and boots needed to help secure animals. People left animals behind thinking they would be gone only for a day or two. Those people who remained were told by rescuers they couldn't take their animals with them in rescue vehicles or into shelters. That has changed after Katrina."

6

KY MORTENSEN

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, ALAMO PINTADO EQUINE MEDICAL CENTER, AUTHOR: "HORSES OF THE STORM: THE INCREDIBLE RESCUE OF KATRINA'S HORSES"

"I think anyone's first reaction to this level of natural disaster is always a moment of awe and disbelief. And then, 'Okay, now what?' What started with a quick drive down the road to check on two horses at a client's house grew into a full-scale equine rescue of over 500 horses. There was an outpouring of support from the LSU team and literally hundreds of volunteers that showed up with the offer of facilities, equipment, hay, trucks, trailers, and a 'can do' attitude. Reuniting a horse with its owner was the biggest reward."

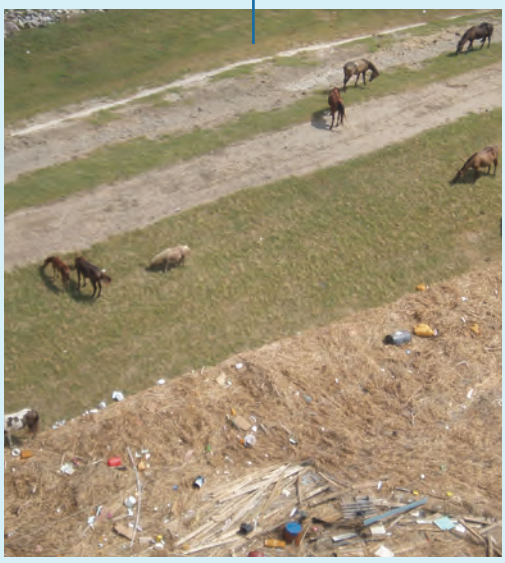
7

NEIL HENDERSON

(CLASS OF 1995) OWNER, PINE RIDGE VETERINARY CENTER

"St. Bernard Parish was where I spent most of my time helping. It was literally destroyed. A man came running up to me and said that while the storm was coming through—he was on the third story of a building—he noticed a dog swimming around frantically with nowhere to go. He opened a window for it with the hopes that it would swim inside the building to safety. A week later, he asked me to go into the building to see if I could find the dog. I did not have much hope but went anyway. There, on the third floor of the building, I found the dog, a boxer, alive."

8



DENNIS FRENCH

RETIRED LSU VET MED PROFESSOR OF LARGE ANIMAL MEDICINE

"Students made an incredible effort during the first 10 days of our service to the horses. We worked together from 6 in the morning until we were done, usually 10 or 11 at night. The days were long and hot. They never complained. Attempting to keep the horses comfortable and negotiating with people was a challenge. Our job was to care for horses once they returned to Lamar Dixon, so we had to wait for trailers that left early and returned in the late afternoon or evening. Trying to keep track of where they came from and how they were identified was a big challenge."

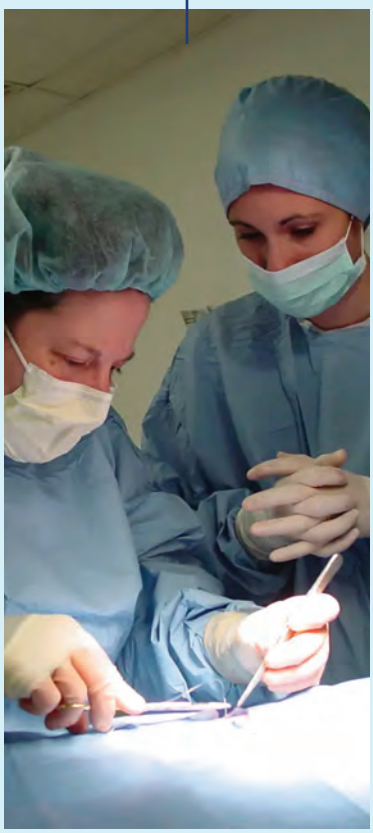
9

RENÉE POIRRIER

(CLASS OF 1988), DIRECTOR, LOUISIANA ANIMAL RESPONSE TEAM, ACADIANA VETERINARY CLINIC OWNER

"Two things stand out all these years later: the willingness of people from all over the country to drop everything and come to help and the willingness of our veterinary community to step up to help. LSU Vet Med set up the call center for large animal owners to get help and sent veterinarians, staff, and students to help manage the Baton Rouge pet shelter, the largest co-located pet shelter in the state. The LSU Vet Med veterinarians managed the large animal shelter at Lamar Dixon. Thirty veterinarians came from all over Louisiana to go out with the small animal search and rescue teams. Lessons from Katrina have made us stronger."

10



WENDY WOLFSON

(CLASS OF 1986), ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF SHELTER MEDICINE

"As the medical director for the LASPCA of New Orleans, my world was turned upside down by the hurricane. Our shelter—which had been in the 9th Ward—had flooded, I lost my home, and most of my coworkers and friends had been displaced. The SPCA set up a large rescue center in an old coffee warehouse on the West Bank. As the sole veterinarian caring for hundreds of animals, I met dozens of dedicated volunteers from across the country, learned how to work with the barest of essentials, and became a far better surgeon. Looking back, every bad moment could be matched by something wonderful."

11

JOSEPH TABOADA

RETIRED PROFESSOR OF COMPANION ANIMAL SCIENCES

"Veterinarians and veterinary technicians came from all over the country to help. We turned two of our classrooms and the study rooms in the Learning Center into places for them to stay. We bartered for mattresses from the University Recreation Center and set up the 'Katrina Hilton,' which held almost 100 people living in the school and working at the shelters. Students got credit for using their skills as veterinary professionals in the shelters. In reading their journals as part of that course, it was obvious they had experiences that were life altering. It was inspiring to see something so positive come from something so tragic."

12

GINGER GUTTNER

LSU VET MED COMMUNICATIONS

"Approximately 10,000 animals were cared for at these shelters, with 2,000 coming through the LSU campus. All but 200 from the LSU shelter were picked up by their owners before the shelter closed after 45 days. Those animals were sent to shelters in Vermont with the understanding that they would be fostered by families in that area and could be returned to their owners whenever they called to claim them. I was responsible for sending out news releases stating we needed volunteers and donations of money and supplies, as well as responding to media requests for interviews. I escorted dozens of reporters from around the world through the facility."

13

LESLIE TALLEY

LSU VET MED VETERINARY TECHNICIAN 1987-2013

"I went out with a team, trucks, and trailers to St. Bernard and lower Plaquemines parishes, to the Chalmette, Violet, and Belle Chasse areas. There was so much devastation. Dr. Jay Addison (Class of 1983) knew the area and could help locate where horses and cattle needing assistance were. We went up in U.S. Coast Guard helicopters to locate cows and horses on levees so the helicopters could return to drop hay and water. Some horses could be removed by barge, though we didn't evacuate all horses. We marked their location for food and water to be dropped. We identified those needing veterinary care."

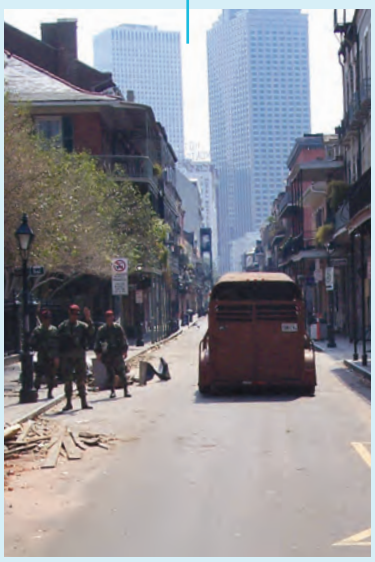
14

MICHELLE L. OSBORN

MA, PHD, LSU VET MED ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

"The continuation of classes seemed unimportant, but it also created a routine, a distraction, perhaps some sense of normalcy during a time that was anything but normal. There is no better example of this than what happened in the Veterinary Anatomy Laboratory at LSU Vet Med. Professor Emeritus Daniel J. Hillmann, opened the veterinary anatomy lab to the LSUHSC human anatomy cadaver labs so that the impact of Katrina on LSU medical students could be minimized. Anyone who has met Dr. Hillmann would not be surprised that they made the lab available to their fellow anatomists in a time of need. This simple action had lasting impacts."

15



DAN BURBA

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY VET MED MCCASLAND PROFESSOR OF BIOMEDICAL LASERS

"Our hospital shut down and we went into emergency duties. We followed a military convoy into New Orleans with two trucks and a trailer to help get French Quarter carriage mules out to safety. A sheriff's posse had corralled them into a lumber yard near Elysian Fields. We pulled up to a building with an open lot and there they were, five mules. We loaded them up and got them to Lamar Dixon. Not all horses made it. Many survived if they could roam free. I relive Katrina every year when I teach a course about lessons learned. Katrina was a game changer."

16

REBECCA S. MCCONNICO

(CLASS OF 1987) DVM, PHD, DACVIM (WITH DENNIS D. FRENCH, DVM; BONNIE CLARK; KY E. MORTENSEN, BS; MARTHA LITTLEFIELD, MS (CLASS OF 1982), DVM; AND RUSTIN M. MOORE, DVM, PHD, DACVS

An excerpt, "Equine Rescue and Response Activities in Louisiana in the Aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita," *published in American Veterinary Medicine Association, August 2007. (avmajournals.avma.org/view/journals/javma/231/3/javma.231.3.384.xml)*

"Because of its close proximity to Lamar Dixon (23 miles), the LSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital served as a resource and referral facility for horses with more serious injuries. Approximately 15 horses were admitted to LSU as a direct result of injuries or illnesses sustained during and after the storms. In addition, several horses with preexisting conditions that required treatment, such as chronic laminitis and other stress-related conditions, were admitted to the LSU hospital."

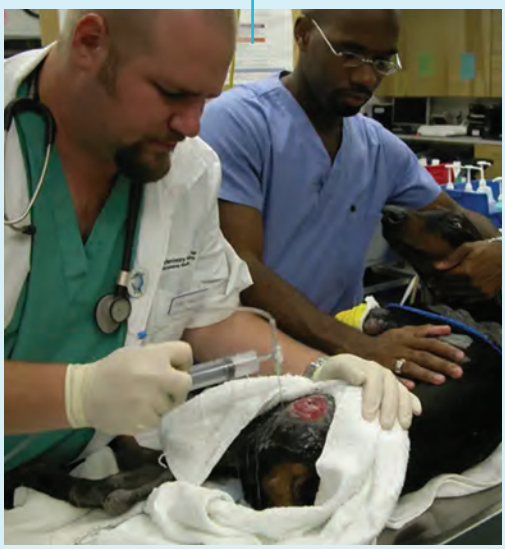
17

DANIELLE READO

A PET OWNER WHOSE DOG WAS TREATED AT LSU VET MED DURING KATRINA AND RETURNED TO HER

Kelsie, an 11-year-old mixed breed dog, survived for five weeks in a flooded house with no food. Kelsie was treated for starvation and dehydration. Kelsie's owner, Danielle Reado, said, "The door was wedged shut, and Kelsie couldn't get out to get to her food. My mother and sister rescued Kelsie and brought her to LSU. We were so happy to see her. It's a true blessing that she survived."

18



PHILLIP MANUEL

A PET OWNER WHOSE DOG WAS TREATED AT THE LSU VET MED

Two Doberman pinschers, Valentino and Diva, were on their own for 16 days before their owner, Phillip Manuel, could get into New Orleans to rescue them. Diva was fine, but Valentino, who was only six months old at the time, was dehydrated and undernourished, and had several pressure sores that required extreme care. According to Dr. Mark Acierno, former assistant professor of companion animal medicine, Valentino was a miracle dog that survived because of the collaboration between the internal medicine, dermatology, and surgery services at LSU. Valentino spent many weeks in the Veterinary Teaching Hospital before joining Diva back at home.

19

CONNIE AND ANDREW GASPARD

PET OWNERS WHOSE DOG WAS TREATED AT LSU VET MED AND RETURNED TO THEM

Connie and Andrew Gaspard had been looking online for their chocolate Labrador retriever, Hershey Kiss. Hershey had been brought to the LSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital from one of the state's animal shelters and was being treated for a skin condition possibly due to exposure to chemicals from the floodwaters in Chalmette, La. Hershey was in the hospital for a few weeks when the Gaspards received a call from a friend letting them know that their dog was at LSU. "We didn't evacuate until the Friday after the storm. We didn't want to leave the dogs. That's the main reason we didn't leave right away," Andrew Gaspard said. Hershey was released from the hospital and joined them in their temporary home in Mandeville, La.

20

KAYE HARRIS

RESCUED MOLLY THE PONY, WHO WAS STRANDED ON A LEVEE, AND EVENTUALLY TREATED AT LSU VET MED

The day before Hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana in 2005, people in a neighborhood south of New Orleans spent all day evacuating their families and pets. Molly, an 18-year-old pony, watched as they all drove away. Eventually, Kaye Harris was called, and she brought Molly to her farm. Three months later, a dog attacked Molly and severely injured her leg.

Dr. Rustin Moore, director of LSU Vet Med's Equine Health Studies Program at the time, noticed that Molly was already adjusting to her injured leg, making her a candidate for a prosthetic leg, a practice extremely uncommon within equine veterinary medicine. Amputating Molly's injured leg below the knee, he fit her with a stiff white cast. The cast was replaced with a prosthetic limb consisting of a round rubber hoof and a smiley face at the bottom of the hoof, which left smiles imprinted on the ground where she walked. Molly became a therapy horse, visiting children's hospitals, nursing homes, and veterans. She worked as a therapy horse until her death in 2018 at 31 years old. Her story inspired a children's book, "Molly the Pony: A True Story," by Pam Kaster. Molly's unforgettable resilience inspired everyone, including her veterinary team at LSU Vet Med.

Drs. Megan Simon, Jackie Simon, and Tori Olivier step outside Country Place Veterinary Clinic, which Dr. Jackie founded to serve the rural community in 1990.

Generations OF CARE

Mother-daughter veterinary team *sustains rural Acadiana*

In a community where veterinary care is scarce, the Simons' work sustains the health of animals, the livelihoods of farmers, and the traditions of rural Acadiana

BY SANDRA SARR

When Dr. Jackie Simon graduated from LSU School of Veterinary Medicine in 1988, she returned to her hometown of St. Martinville, La., prepared to serve her community. Two years later, she opened Country Place Veterinary Clinic, becoming the only veterinarian for miles around—a role she has filled for more than 30 years.

In 2019, her daughter, Dr. Megan Simon, followed in her footsteps, bringing her own LSU Vet Med degree and a passion for large animals, exotics, and avian medicine. Together, they grew from a one-woman veterinary

Dr. Jackie Simon enjoys thumbing through her photo albums and remembering the patients she has cared for during more than 30 years in practice.

practice into a family provider of services for their rural community. In 2025, the duo welcomed another LSU Vet Med graduate, Dr. Tori Olivier, who had long hoped to join the clinic.

Today, they remain the only veterinarians in the community, caring for animals of every size and species. With the support of 11 veterinary technicians and staff members, they treat dogs, cats, cattle, horses, goats, birds, reptiles—even peacocks and petting zoo animals. “If it can fit through the clinic door, we will look at it,” Dr. Jackie said with a smile. For livestock and exotic animals that can’t make the trip, the doctors take their care and well-equipped vehicle on the road, from Morgan City petting zoos to Jefferson Island’s Rip Van Winkle Garden peacocks and farms in between.

THEY REMAIN THE ONLY VETERINARIANS IN THE COMMUNITY, CARING FOR ANIMALS OF EVERY SIZE AND SPECIES.

Their work often means answering calls when owners have tried everything else and an animal’s condition has worsened. “There’s no one else around to take care of them,” Dr. Megan explained. She and Dr. Tori travel to farms at least once each week treating cattle, horses, and bulls—work that helps keep Acadiana’s agricultural backbone healthy and strong.

Affordability and honesty guide their practice. “I always

"IS THE ANIMAL A PET OR LIVESTOCK TO YOU? THE ANSWER SHAPES THE TREATMENT PLAN."

start by asking a client—for example, if it's a goat—'Is this animal a pet or livestock to you?' The answer shapes the treatment plan," Dr. Jackie said.

Beyond clinical work, both veterinarians support local agriculture and animal health initiatives. They issue health certificates for livestock shows, teach animal care to petting zookeepers, and continue Dr. Jackie's longstanding commitment to education supporting animal health. She taught "Healthy Heart" classes, part of an American Veterinary Medical Association campaign, which educated children about heartworm prevention through school visits and essay contests themed "Why

“WE RESPECT EACH OTHER’S OPINIONS,” DR. JACKIE SAID. “I’VE DONE THINGS A CERTAIN WAY FOR YEARS, AND MEGAN BRINGS NEW APPROACHES.” DR. MEGAN ADDED, “WE ACTUALLY LISTEN TO EACH OTHER.”

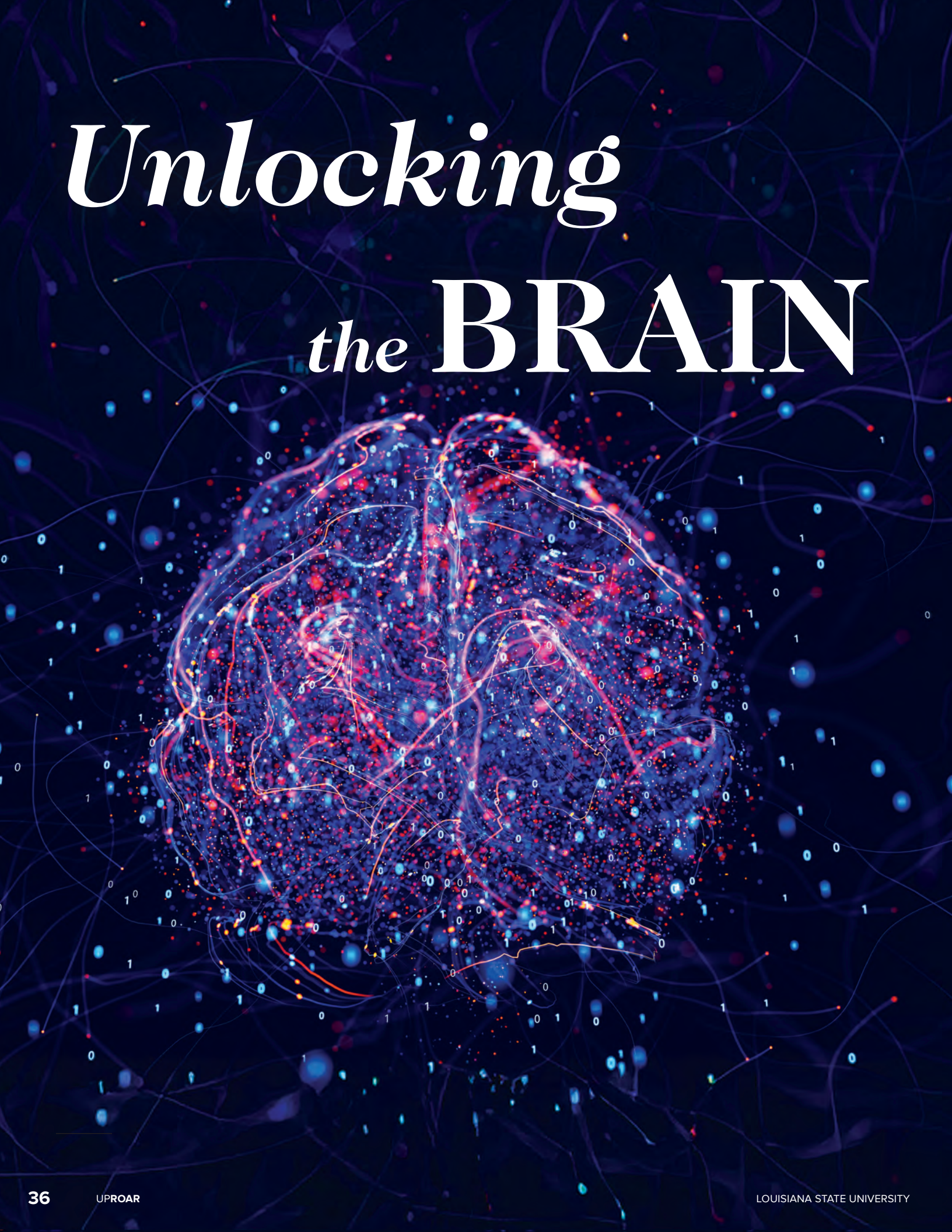
my dog has a healthy heart,” important messages in a region fraught with deadly and preventable heartworm disease.

For Dr. Jackie, the inspiration to become a veterinarian began in childhood when she lost a calf during a difficult birth. For Dr. Megan, it grew from 4-H poultry projects that sparked her love of avian medicine. Now, the two share not only a calling but also a workplace. “We respect each other’s opinions,” Dr. Jackie said. “I’ve done things a certain way for years, and Megan brings new approaches.” Dr. Megan added, “We actually listen to each other.”

The walls of the clinic are lined with photos and certificates that tell the story of generations of animals—and families—who have relied on their care.

From turtles and geckos to cattle and horses, their work has helped shape the story of a rural parish itself, a country place where families and animals grow up together under their care.

Unlocking the BRAIN



How LSU Vet Med is forging new pathways in neuroscience

BY SANDRA SARR

The brain is often called the body's final frontier—a dense, electrified network that shapes who we are, how we act, and how we heal. At the LSU School of Veterinary Medicine, researchers and clinicians are working together to explore that frontier from every angle. What sets LSU apart is the breadth of expertise gathered under one roof: scientists probing molecular mysteries, veterinarians developing life-changing therapies, and clinicians translating discoveries into treatments for beloved pets.

It's a vibrant ecosystem where questions about brain health—human or animal—seek and find answers.

Unlocking the Brain

WHEN THE ENVIRONMENT REWIRES THE BRAIN

The brain's earliest moments of development are also its most vulnerable. In Dr. Ahmed Abdelmoneim's lab, zebrafish—tiny, translucent creatures whose brains light up under a microscope—reveal how environmental contaminants like lead alter the stress-response system. His discoveries hold profound implications for children growing up in polluted communities, as well as for animals exposed to toxins in soil and water.

SEARCHING FOR FREEDOM FROM ADDICTION

Down the hall, Dr. Ethan Anderson zeroes in on the brain's reward center, a structure called the nucleus accumbens. His team studies how addiction reshapes this region, rewiring it to crave substances like alcohol or opioids. By finding ways to reverse those changes, Dr. Anderson is pioneering therapies that could one day free those trapped in the cycle of dependence.

HEARING THE WORLD, UNDERSTANDING THE MIND

For Dr. Charles Lee, the brain is a symphony. His lab investigates how we process sound—how the brain weaves together voices, music, and the buzz of daily life. This research not only explains the marvel of hearing but also provides insights into conditions like autism, schizophrenia, and Alzheimer's disease, where that symphony falters.

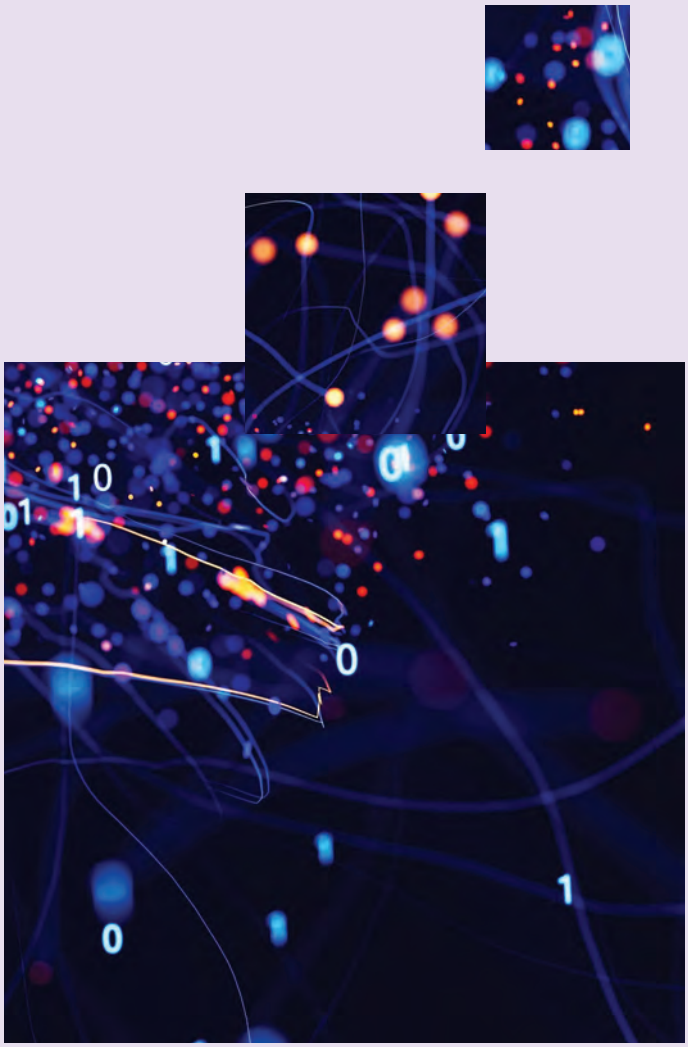
HOW TODAY'S CHOICES SHAPE TOMORROW'S BRAINS

What we eat, how we move, even the air we breathe—these choices ripple through our brains and, as Dr. Alexander Murashov has discovered, leave lasting marks on the next generation. Using fruit flies, his lab shows how diet and environment reprogram brain metabolism through epigenetic changes, predisposing offspring to neurological and metabolic disorders. His work underscores a powerful truth: brain health is not only about us but about those who come after us.

CRACKING THE CODE OF MEMORY AND DECISION-MAKING

Dr. Michael Ogundele explores one of the brain's most captivating puzzles: how we learn, remember, and decide. His team studies how reward-related brain regions and the hippocampus work together to assign value to new experiences. By mapping these pathways, Dr. Ogundele's research offers

SCIENTISTS STUDYING MOLECULAR SIGNALING ARE WORKING STEPS AWAY FROM CLINICIANS SOLVING THE MEDICAL PUZZLES OF PATIENTS.



insights into disorders where decision-making goes awry, from Alzheimer's disease to schizophrenia.

AT THE CROSSROADS OF TRAUMA AND DEGENERATION

For Dr. Fabio Vigil, the mysteries lie where traumatic brain injury, epilepsy, and Alzheimer's disease overlap. His lab focuses on potassium channels—tiny molecular gates that regulate electrical activity in neurons. By studying how these channels malfunction after injury, Dr. Vigil is developing strategies to protect the brain from long-term decline.

FROM LAB BENCH TO OPERATING TABLE

Discovery is not the whole story at LSU Vet Med. In the hospital, clinical neurologists bring this expertise directly to patients. Dr. Colleen Embersics specializes in brain and spinal surgery, canine epilepsy, and cutting-edge therapies like ultrasound and 3D-printed surgical implants. Her work pushes the boundaries of what's possible in veterinary neurology.

ONE ROOF, MANY PERSPECTIVES

What makes LSU Vet Med exceptional is the way this expertise converges. Scientists studying molecular signaling are working steps away from clinicians solving the medical puzzles of patients. Together, they create a cycle of innovation that accelerates discovery and care.

From zebrafish to fruit flies, from advanced imaging to delicate brain surgery, LSU Vet Med's neuroscience enterprise is emerging as a powerful hub for neuroscience at LSU. The questions they ask—and the answers they uncover—matter not just for the animals who come through the hospital doors but for human families, communities, and future generations.

At LSU Vet Med, unlocking the brain is not a solitary pursuit. It's a shared mission to understand, heal, and protect one of nature's greatest mysteries.

Dr. Tiffany Wolf implements One Health philosophy through collaborative research

BY NATALIE KAISER

FROM STUDYING MOOSE IN the snowy woods of Minnesota to tracking down the causes of emerging diseases in the Amazon, Dr. Tiffany Wolf embodies the philosophy of One Health, the idea that animal, human, and environmental health are all connected.

A 2002 graduate of LSU School of Veterinary Medicine, Dr. Wolf first joined the effort to study Minnesota's then-declining moose population as the project veterinarian, responsible for ensuring the welfare and safety of both the animals and the people involved. When she started to take interest in attempting to better understand the health of the entire population, she dove head first into research.

Her partnership with an Ojibwe tribe in northern Minnesota during their research on moose led to more questions about the health of different wildlife populations. The research has since expanded and so has the relationship between Dr. Wolf and other Minnesota Tribal Nations.

"In Minnesota we have 11 federally recognized tribes, and the university is committed to working with them on research in a trusting and respectful manner," Dr. Wolf said. "In my experience, that kind of approach not only benefits the working relationship, but it enhances the quality of the science, ensuring the outputs are directly beneficial to our tribal partners."

Dr. Wolf is pictured here with a sedated moose while conducting research on Minnesota's moose population. A Louisiana native, Dr. Wolf said she practically grew up at Audubon Zoo in New Orleans. When she had the opportunity to meet the veterinarian there in high school, she knew pursuing a career in zoological and wildlife medicine was what she was meant to do.

Her research is often shaped around the needs of those tribes. Tribal members' questions often demonstrate their perspectives on healthy ecosystems and the interconnectedness of humans, frequently sparking Dr. Wolf's next vein of research.

"The concept of One Health is not new to the tribal members I've worked with; they've always lived it," Dr. Wolf said.

She continues this fruitful collaboration with her current research on Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). CWD is a neurological disease affecting deer and a huge cause of concern for the tribes in Minnesota. Many in those communities are subsistence hunters, meaning they hunt primarily for food and other culturally important benefits. The deer are not strictly used for food. Their leather and hides are used to make many traditional cultural products as well.

Dr. Wolf's research aims to solve the question: How is this disease going to affect tribes' traditional cultures as they know it? And what are the ways in which tribes can maintain the benefits they derive from deer harvest while successfully managing the disease?

"Everything that we are doing in regard to research on CWD with our tribal partners is based on their priorities and their questions," she said.

Dr. Wolf helps tribal nations in conducting surveillance for CWD, thinking through management plans, and understanding how the decisions they make as managers impact ongoing transmission of CWD in their deer populations.

The collaboration between the partners is not one-sided, instead its complementary. "When we talk about CWD, tribal members might ask about the eagles and how it is going to affect the eagle populations that also consume deer carcasses," said Dr. Wolf. "They are thinking broadly which I really appreciate because that's the context in which I like to work—thinking about the system as a whole."

The most satisfying aspect of this collaboration with the tribes in her research, she says, is that they have direct access to all of her findings, which can directly inform their decisions and choices related to wildlife health.

"Our research isn't just sitting in a scientific publication to be read by a very small number of scientists, but it's also getting back to the community that inspired that question to begin with," she said.

For Dr. Wolf, research involves "playing the long game," while other veterinary ventures may offer more immediate gratification.

"We are never going to run out of questions. If my research can have positive impacts, then I will keep working and playing the long game," said Dr. Wolf.

Dr. Mark Mitchell, professor of zoological medicine, acted as Dr. Wolf's mentor during her time as a student at LSU Vet Med. "Dr. Wolf's research has broad impacts, and what she is learning about CWD in the northern part of the country can help provide further insight into our own challenges with the disease in her home state of Louisiana," he said.

"DR. WOLF'S RESEARCH HAS BROAD IMPACTS, AND WHAT SHE IS LEARNING ABOUT CWD ... CAN HELP PROVIDE FURTHER INSIGHT INTO ... CHALLENGES ... IN HER HOME STATE OF LOUISIANA."

Dr. Wolf is part of a couple research teams studying emerging diseases in South America, including a team working with an Indigenous group in Guyana. That team is also trying to understand emerging disease risks within their subsistence practices.

In May, Dr. Wolf joined a One Health research team in Brazil to conduct a preliminary study of pathogen transmission between wildlife and domestic animals, such as cattle and dogs, in the Pantanal, the largest tropical wetland area in the world.

When Dr. Wolf is not out in the field collecting data on wildlife health, she's in the classroom, teaching about ecosystem health to veterinary students at the University of Minnesota School of Veterinary Medicine, as an associate professor in the Department of Veterinary Population Medicine.

"Whether they are going to be food production or small animal veterinarians, I have the opportunity to teach them about One Health, encouraging them to think about how what they observe and how they respond as clinical practitioners are connected to what's happening in our larger ecosystem," she said.

While at LSU Vet Med, Dr. Wolf participated in the Summer Scholars program, which was her introduction to One Health. Her project explored the potential for wild Louisiana reptiles to play a role in the transmission of an equine virus, Eastern Equine Encephalitis virus. She chose Dr. Mitchell as her mentor, which she said was not a difficult decision due to his inspiring and engaging nature as an educator.

Since Dr. Wolf's graduation from LSU Vet Med, they occasionally meet up for "Zoom coffee chats" in which they share perspectives as professionals in zoo med and professors at veterinary schools.

"I first met Tiffany as a first-year veterinary student, and I could tell right away she was destined to be an advocate for One Health," Dr. Mitchell said. "I have been very fortunate to have the opportunity to observe her develop from student to recognized expert, using her skills to help those whose voices might not be heard. She is an excellent example of what an LSU Tiger has to offer this world."

Dr. Ashley Stokes brings her drive to thrive as new UC Davis Ag & Environmental Sciences dean

BY NATALIE KAISER

Dr. Stokes in Micronesia working with farmers on animal health as an extension veterinarian while at the University of Hawaii.

FROM HER EARLIEST DAYS, Dr. Ashley M. Stokes was the child who always needed to know why. She had a tiny microscope, and her dad would prick his finger and let her look at the drop of blood under the microscope. Her mom instilled within her a love of birdwatching and learning about behaviors and habitats. That childlike curiosity and drive helped lead her to increasingly prominent leadership roles within higher education.

In late June 2025, Dr. Stokes packed up her belongings and drove with her cat from the University of Tennessee, where she was a professor of veterinary large animal clinical sciences and served as dean of UT Extension, to the University of California, Davis. Along the way, she visited national parks, arriving in Davis to begin her new role as dean of the UC Davis College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences in July 2025. In this role, she oversees the college's people, programs, and resources; directs its research and extension efforts; and represents the college in university and statewide leadership.

“WHETHER IT’S WORKING AS A LEADER, IN EXTENSION, OR AS A VETERINARIAN, SO MUCH OF WHAT WE DO HELPS PEOPLE, ANIMALS, AND THE ENVIRONMENT THRIVE.”

Dr. Stokes’ first headshot as dean of UC Davis College of Ag and Environmental Sciences.

“To be a good leader, you have to be willing to continually learn all the time,” Dr. Stokes said. “I consider myself forever a student—I love to learn.”

Along with her love of learning, she is passionate about helping communities thrive—a value she lives by and fosters in others. “Whether it’s working as a leader, in extension, or as a veterinarian, so much of what we do helps people, animals, and the environment thrive,” she said.

Now, Dr. Stokes brings that same drive to UC Davis, where she envisions ambitious goals and meaningful contributions. “Even though I’m in a college of agricultural and environmental sciences, I would really like to grow the collaborations with the veterinary college here,” she said. “When we think about One Health—the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health—and we look at our planet, people, and animals, it makes so much sense for us to grow that partnership and make a lasting difference.”

Although the college already excels in many areas, Dr. Stokes hopes to take it even further. “The program is number two in the world, and it sure would be great to be number one,” she said.

Her strong sense of ambition can be traced to her time at LSU Vet Med, where she became the first person to obtain both a DVM and PhD from the school. Sparked by a love of research, she suggested the dual degree to faculty members while volunteering in the lab of Dr. Rustin Moore, one of her mentors. “I was a first-year veterinary student, and I started out volunteering in Dr. Moore’s lab. I approached him and said, ‘Hey, there are some other universities that are doing this. What do you think?’”

Her request was approved, and together with other LSU Vet Med leaders, they developed an early version of the dual degree program. She earned her DVM in 2001 and her PhD in cardiovascular physiology and pharmacology in 2003. After graduation, she taught at LSU Vet Med for five years, serving during Hurricane Katrina rescue and recovery, before moving on to positions at the University of Hawaii, Colorado State University, and the University of Tennessee.

“The issues that are local have global implications too. It’s really neat in these jobs that I’ve been able to connect at both the local and global level. Whether it’s working with horse owners in Louisiana, beef producers in Kenya, or kids in 4-H in American Samoa, these connections can help drive global change while also helping others thrive in their lives.

“I can’t wait to see what we’re going to accomplish together here at UC Davis,” she said.

L to R: Dean Oliver Garden, Jay Carter, Phil Pickett, Bernie Meyer, Tiger Hulsey, Steve Amaro, Randy Kilgore, Nickie Kilgore, Phil Waguespack, Mike Smith, Marlon Rovira directly in front of Scott Buzhardt, Lynn Buzhardt, Bill Ormsbee, Mona Vickery, Gary Warner, Ann Guedry, Dennis Perkins, Cathy Ormsbee, Gretchen Morgan. Not pictured are Charles and Julie Burns.

"...THERE IS A SPECIAL SENSE OF CARING AND CAMARADERIE AMONGST OUR CLASS."

—DENNIS PERKINS

1980

Members of the **Class of 1980** got together for a tour of LSU Vet Med before heading off to their 45th anniversary at Lynn and Scott Buzhardt's camp on False River in New Roads, La. They spent the weekend celebrating and enjoying an array of delicious food, including a 100-pound crawfish boil, an assortment of breakfast foods, and homemade desserts. Participants traveled from all over—Virginia, Colorado, Texas, South Carolina, Kentucky, Florida—to celebrate with each other. The class spent the weekend bonding and reminiscing on their time at LSU Vet Med 45 years ago. "It was apparent that everyone seemed to really enjoy each other's company and that there is a special sense of caring and camaraderie amongst our class," Dennis Perkins said.

1984

Ed Boldt sold his horse farm where he lived and practiced for 21 years. He bought a smaller place further east from Fort Collins in a small town called Ault, Colo., where he continues to practice full time.

L to R: Mike and Christine Smith, Julie and Charles Burns, Cathy Kaga and Bill Ormsbee are visiting LSU Vet Med before heading out to their 45th class reunion.

L to R: Steve Amaro, Mike Smith, and Lynn Buzhardt enjoying a home-cooked breakfast during their weekend-long class reunion celebration.

Meet Natalie Kaiser, Class Notes editor of UPROAR Magazine and student intern in LSU Vet Med Communications. Natalie is an LSU senior majoring in mass communication with a concentration in public relations. Natalie is waiting to receive your recent news to share with classmates, former professors, and your friends at LSU Vet Med. Topics can include updates about family, job, travels, accomplishments, and any other news you care to share. She especially appreciates receiving photos to accompany your updates.

Please send Class Notes items to Natalie at **nkaise1@lsu.edu.**

1987

Laura Hokett has been running "Street Vet for the Unhoused," a pop-up veterinary clinic exclusively for the unhoused community and their pets in Fayetteville, Ark., since 2021. Laura became interested in providing this service to the community from simply seeing the need for it within Fayetteville. The clinic is run monthly out of the Genesis Church, which also provides services for the unhoused community in Fayetteville. Run under the nonprofit Humane Society of the Ozarks, an animal rescue servicing Arkansas, the clinic receives donations of supplies, money, and community volunteers. The clinic provides preventative services such as vaccines, flea and tick prevention, and general medical care like spay-neuter referrals, pet supplies, microchips, medical inquiries, and more at no charge. They also offer a compassionate euthanasia program created for families who need to let their pets go for medical or age-related reasons but cannot afford it.

"These animals would not receive medical care or other help if we were not there. They are so important to their owners who have very little but love them very much," Laura said. "The rising cost of vet care is a challenge for many, and it's an honor and a privilege to be able to provide these services."

Laura Hokett is with fellow alumnus Jeff Nulph, a 1988 graduate, at a recent "Street Vet for the Unhoused" pop-up clinic event.

1998

Kevin Oppenheimer retired during the COVID-19 years but keeps his licenses active in Florida and New York, as well as his membership in the American Veterinary Association (AVMA) and the Drug Enforcement Administration. "I am not quite ready to throw in the entire towel," he reports.

2000

Shirani Hickman bought Natchez Veterinary Clinic in 2022. She has two daughters, Annie and Patty. Annie is a freshman in high school at Adams County Christian School in Natchez, Miss. Patty is a freshman at Mississippi College, where she is majoring in pre-vet biology with aspirations to attend LSU Vet Med in the future.

"THESE ANIMALS WOULD NOT RECEIVE MEDICAL CARE OR OTHER HELP IF WE WERE NOT THERE. THEY ARE SO IMPORTANT TO THEIR OWNERS WHO HAVE VERY LITTLE BUT LOVE THEM VERY MUCH."

—LAURA HOKETT

Sherrie Jean gives a talk at the AVMA Convention in late July.

2007

Sherrie Jean recently gave a talk on biosafety and biosecurity at the AVMA Convention, providing fellow veterinarians with insights into regulatory, ethical, and scientific aspects of animal research.

Chris Boehm has retired from her job as the attending veterinarian at the Vrije Universiteit Brussels in Belgium. She is retiring to Santa Margheritia Liguria in Italy but will still do some consulting through the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee.

2010

Katie Maher practices in Covington, La., at Maher Animal Hospital which her father, Rusty Maher, a 1981 graduate of LSU Vet Med, opened in 1982. Katie grew up in the clinic, later following in her father's footsteps. She runs a mentorship program called Let's Get You into Vet School, which leads individuals through the veterinary school application process. She also wrote an eBook of the same name, released in 2022 and available for purchase on Amazon.

Pictured: Egeenee and Rhonda Daniels, who met at LSU Vet Med in 1985. They celebrated their 40th anniversary of meeting at the school this year.

COUPLES: DID YOU MEET AT LSU VET MED?

Please share your stories and pictures with us for an upcoming UPROAR feature, "We met in vet school."

nkaise1@lsu.edu

Jessica Turner and her son, Daniel.

2010

Jessica Turner has been actively involved with wellness advocacy within the veterinary profession for some time now. She hosted a wellness podcast, "Living Well with Dr. Jessica," through Vet Candy for over two years, where topics such as mental health were often discussed. In 2022, Jessica had her son, Daniel, which led to her stepping away from podcasting to focus on being a mom. Now that he is in school, along with his twin sisters, Jessica is excited to get back into mental health advocacy. She is currently working on a book, to be published by Blue Hat Publishing Company, that invites readers into her personal journey with mental illness, weaving in scientific data and tangible resources that can lead to a life full of hope despite a diagnosis.

Georgia Hansen and her dog, Quinn.

2023

Georgia Hansen joined the Perkins Road Veterinary Hospital team as one of their veterinarians in September. After graduating, she moved to Flower Mound, Texas, and worked at a clinic there for two years before deciding to move back to her home state of Louisiana. When she is not at the clinic, she enjoys staying active, cheering on LSU sports, and spending time with her husband, their son, and their two dogs.

SHARE YOUR NEWS WITH US!

UPROAR readers love hearing from each other! Send us your news and photos, including career news, retirements, marriages, births, and other milestones for publication in our Spring 2026 issue: **nkaise1@lsu.edu**

Parting Shot

REGALIA FOR TWO
For Victoria Hernandez, graduating from veterinary school was an achievement to be shared with her loyal pup, who has been with her through late-night study sessions, clinical rotations, and every challenge along the way—making this milestone a true team achievement.

LSU | School of Veterinary Medicine

Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803

Autumn is in the air and is meant to be savored here at LSU Vet Med.