

Spring 2025

# UPROAR

The Magazine of the Louisiana State University School of Veterinary Medicine

## Visionaries bettering lives



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A research powerhouse that  
better lives

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# administration

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*Dr. Hilary Householder, a 2016 graduate of LSU Vet Med who is now associate veterinarian at Audubon Zoo, explains to LSU Vet Med Communications staff in a video interview how she knows that Victor the alligator is able to see his meals again after surgery at LSU Vet Med. (See the story on page 38.)*  
Photo: Melissa Lee





## Mission: possible

W

e are on a mission to better lives. One way we do so is by constantly working to deliver discoveries in

biomedical, veterinary, and One Health sciences that improve Louisiana and our world. At LSU Vet Med, we are a research powerhouse ranking #3 in National Institutes of Health (NIH) research funding per faculty member and #9 in total NIH research funding overall among veterinary schools in the U.S. We seek cures for both animal and human diseases and are making major advances in cancer, lung biology and disease, and biomedical neuroscience.

In this issue of UPROAR, we feature Dr. Alexandra Noël's research that is shaping the way we understand vaping by pregnant women and its effects on their offspring. Her groundbreaking research is paving the way for better understanding, prevention, and treatment of potential lung diseases following gestational exposures to vaping products.

This issue delivers more discovery. Dr. Kimberly Boykin, who earned her master's and PhD from LSU Vet Med, focuses on conservation medicine and cutting-edge research into biosecurity and the sustainability of nontraditional food sources, like edible insects. With the world's population expected to reach 10 billion by 2050, her work addresses a pressing question: How do we feed more people with fewer resources?

Earlier this spring, Dr. Holden Thorp, editor-in-chief of Science, was on campus as part of LSU's College of Science and Dramatic Arts festival bringing art and science together. He emphasized that breakthroughs in

understanding often emerge when science embraces the other disciplines. We are no strangers to new discoveries when art and science intentionally come together. Our 2023 Artist-in-Residence (AIR), Charlie Rauh, has a new book with an essay describing discoveries during his residency as a composer-musician here. Our 2024 AIR, Dr. Brandon Kilbourne, just received the prestigious Cave Canem Prize in poetry. Soon, we will welcome our fourth artist-in-residence, Pippin Frisbie-Calder, an accomplished visual artist. These artists amplify our mission and show us new ways to discover.

Finally, Dr. William Beavers, who investigates how lipids kill *staphylococcal* bacteria, a major cause of serious infections worldwide, reflects on how we arrive at discoveries, saying, "Without a full understanding of the causes and effects of these diseases, the dreams of future scientists will remain just that—dreams. Basic science creates a foundation of knowledge that allows us to create groundbreaking new therapies that today can only be called science fiction."

By exploring bold questions and investing in the pursuit of answers, we expand the boundaries of knowledge and make the unimaginable possible. That's how we roll at LSU Vet Med, whether teaching, healing, discovering, or protecting—you will find stories that bring our missions to life throughout this issue of UPROAR.

With my warmest wishes to you all,

## Westminster Kennel Club names Dr. Sara K. Lyle Veterinarian of the Year

BY GINGER GUTTNER

**FOR NEARLY A CENTURY** and a half, the Westminster Kennel Club (WKC) has been a pillar in the world of canine excellence. In recent years, its mission has expanded beyond the show ring to honor the dedicated veterinarians who ensure our pets live healthier, happier lives. In 2025, Associate Professor of Theriogenology Dr. Sara K. Lyle was selected as WKC's Veterinarian of the Year from more than 300 nominations nationwide.

The award, presented during the 149th Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show in New York City, honors veterinarians who embody excellence, compassion, and advocacy in animal health care. The WKC recognizes not only Dr. Lyle's impressive clinical and academic career but also her leadership in addressing mental health in the veterinary profession.

"I am incredibly humbled and honored to be recognized as the Westminster Kennel Club's Veterinarian of the Year. Education and service are at the heart of my work from the cornerstone of canine health to raising research funds through the Theriogenology Foundation. I am thankful to the Westminster Kennel Club for creating this award, which shines a light on Not One More Vet and its support of mental well-being within the veterinary community," Dr. Lyle said.

As part of the award, Westminster will donate \$10,000 in Dr. Lyle's name to Not One More Vet, an organization providing critical mental health resources to veterinary professionals.

Dr. Lyle joined LSU Vet Med in 2002 after 10 years in private practice. Her move from clinic to classroom positions her to inspire the next generation of veterinary professionals. A board-certified theriogenologist, her research focuses on reproductive management strategies, assisted reproductive technologies, and the immunology of reproductive disorders.

She's a published author, educator, and advocate. As president of the Theriogenology Foundation, the funds she



raises help support scientific research and education in reproductive veterinary medicine.

Dr. Lyle also works with the Louisiana State Animal Response Team, aiding animal rescue efforts following hurricanes across South Louisiana. She remains an active member of key professional organizations, including the American Veterinary Medicine Association, the Society for Theriogenology, the American College of Theriogenologists, and the Society of Phi Zeta, the national veterinary honor society.

WKC launched its Veterinarian of the Year initiative in 2022 as part of its broader Westminster Cares program, which also supports

breed rescue, canine health, and responsible dog ownership. In honoring Dr. Lyle, WKC acknowledges not only her scientific and educational achievements but also her dedication to the emotional and spiritual well-being of her profession.

Finalists for the 2025 Veterinarian of the Year included Dr. Douglas Tack (New Jersey), Dr. Daryl Waits (Ohio), and Dr. Kyle Schumacher (New Mexico). The distinguished judging panel featured previous recipient Dr. Treyton Diggs, alongside Drs. Marty Greer and Joseph Rossi.

Dr. Lyle's national recognition reflects the values LSU Vet Med strives to instill in every graduate: integrity, compassion, and innovation.

# Dr. Nancy Welborn advises LSU's STEP Club, which trains puppies for a life of service

BY NATALIE KAISER

## IF YOU'VE SEEN STUDENTS

strolling LSU's campus with puppies in yellow and blue vests emblazoned with "future service dog," then you've seen LSU's Service Dog Training Education Program (STEP) Club at work. Through the national organization Canine Companions, STEP educates students about service dogs through hands-on puppy-raising, and the puppies learn skills to prepare them to work as service dogs for adults or children with conditions like cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, deafness, and more. The dogs also get trained to work as service dogs for veterans and for professionals working in health care, criminal justice, and educational settings. As of 2018, Canine Companions has placed over 6,000 assistance dogs with recipients at no charge.

Dr. Nancy Welborn, associate professor of community practice at LSU School of Veterinary Medicine, serves as the STEP Club advisor. "Since I am a veterinarian, I can also discuss any medical issues the pups may have," she said.

Ariana Tashakkori, co-founder and president of STEP, always wanted to raise a future service dog in college, but LSU lacked a program to do so. So, she connected with interested students and,

together, they formed the STEP Club in early 2023.

"My favorite part about STEP is the potential for our trained puppies to change lives one day," Tashakkori said.

The puppy-raising process typically begins with Canine Companions, nonprofit and partner of STEP whose work focuses on providing adults, children, veterans, and facilities service dogs free of charge. Canine Companions provides individual students with an eight-week-old golden retriever or Labrador puppy who lives with the student for about a year and a half. The student begins by teaching simple commands, eventually working up to 30 commands. The puppy accompanies the student to all of their activities, including classes and extracurricular activities, to familiarize the dogs with public environments.

The puppy-raising process takes about 16 to 18 months.

*STEP is made up of many members who aspire to pursue careers in veterinary medicine. From left Berkeley Bolinger, Dr. Nancy Welborn, STEP President Ariana Tashakkori, and Vice President Cori Bertrand. Tashakkori, STEP president, will be attending veterinary school this fall. Similarly, Bertrand and Bolinger, who also serve as puppy raisers of Tonic, both hope to attend LSU Vet Med in the future.*

*Tonic as a puppy on the day of his arrival in Louisiana September 2024. He arrived on flight from Canine Companions headquarters in California.*



After that, the puppies are returned to Canine Companions' headquarters, where they undergo additional training for six to nine months. Once their training is complete, Canine Companions places the dog with an individual in need of service. So far, the club has raised three future service dogs.

Club members are currently raising two more, Tai and Tonic, who are set to head off for professional training in November.

The club, along with help from Canine Companions, provides all the supplies needed to the student. "We have also provided veterinary care to the puppies the club has received so far," Dr. Welborn said.

STEP is more than just puppy-raising. "Outside of our official general body meetings, we hold social events for members to engage with the dogs, volunteer events, puppy classes, and more," Tashakkori said. Leaders also hold monthly meetings with featured speakers from different backgrounds to educate members in the world of working dogs and service animals. Members who don't participate in raising puppies can opt to puppy-sit for other club members.

"My hope for the club is multifocal," Welborn said. "First, to expose people to the process of training working dogs. Second, to give people who have not been around dogs the opportunity to learn about dogs in general and then become informed about what working dogs do. Third, to give students the opportunities of social engagement with dogs."

The STEP Club is open to all LSU students, regardless of major or background. "We welcome everyone into our community of advocates," Tashakkori said. If you're interested in joining STEP, contact Ariana Tashakkori at [atasha1@lsu.edu](mailto:atasha1@lsu.edu).





## LSU Vet Med and LSART collaborate to train disaster responders

*Stronger together: Veterinary professionals, students, and emergency responders strengthen their disaster response skills at hands-on training.*

**THE LOUISIANA STATE ANIMAL** Response Team (LSART) and LSU School of Veterinary Medicine joined forces the week of April 7 for the 15th annual LSART Animal Responder Boot Camp. This hands-on training event strengthens disaster response skills for veterinary professionals, students, and emergency responders across Louisiana, marking 15 years of collaboration between LSART and LSU Vet Med in advancing disaster response education.

Over the course of the week, participants—including veterinarians, veterinary students, LSART members and responders from multiple parishes—engaged in hands-on exercises and expert-led lectures on topics like pet evacuation, large and small animal decontamination, large animal rescue, and disaster preparedness.

This year's boot camp also welcomed guests from the University of California, Davis. In attendance from UC Davis'



California Veterinary Emergency Team were Dr. Briana Hamamoto and Kimberly Carlson, RVT operational specialist, to strengthen collaboration and learn how Louisiana handles animal rescue during disasters.

"The more we work together, the more we can advance disaster medicine," Dr. Hamamoto said.

The collaborative efforts of LSU Vet Med and LSART brought together a diverse group of professionals, with experts from both organizations providing valuable insight and training. Among the instructors were LSU Vet Med faculty and staff, along with members of LSART.

Dr. Renee Poirrier, director of LSART and adjunct assistant professor at LSU



*Large animal rescue was part of the week-long training.*

Vet Med, emphasized the importance of veterinary involvement in disaster response efforts.

“Something I don’t think most veterinarians understand is that when they step on the scene of a disaster, because they’re a veterinarian, they’re automatically seen as a professional,” Dr. Poirrier said. “People are going to want to listen to them more than anybody else. They need to be prepared.”

Recognized as one of the nation’s top veterinary disaster response programs, LSU Vet Med’s Disaster Training and Response Program trains veterinary students and professionals to handle emergencies ranging from large-scale disasters to individual rescues. During major disasters like Hurricane Katrina, the Disaster Training and Response Program, along with LSART, aided in rescue efforts.

While many veterinary students who attended the boot camp will contribute to local disaster response efforts, the training prepares them to assist nationwide, as well.

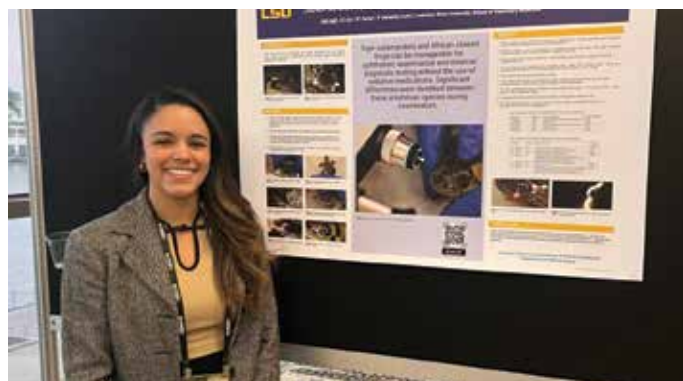
“In every state, there are disasters, and veterinarians should be a part of their community disaster response,” Dr. Poirrier said. “They are necessary and needed.”

By the end of the boot camp, participants left better prepared to respond to emergencies and ensure the safety of animals during disasters.

## Ophthalmology Team honored at ACVO Conference

**THE LSU SCHOOL OF** Veterinary Medicine Ophthalmology Service was recognized by its peers for its outstanding achievements at the 2024 American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists Conference in Savannah, Ga. Dr. Hannah Gafen, third-year resident, won first place for the best research science project, recognizing her published article on bovine keratoconjunctivitis. Dr. Sydney Hall, last year’s rotating intern now specializing in an ophthalmology internship,

also represented LSU with a poster presentation. Her study, conducted alongside Dr. Gafen and Dr. Renee Carter, professor of veterinary ophthalmology, showcased more of the innovative work happening at LSU Vet Med. In addition, Daniela Saade, Class of 2026, presented her work titled “Replication kinetics and cytopathic effect of feline calicivirus in feline corneal epithelial cells.” This work also resulted in an accepted first author manuscript for Saade that will be published in the journal *Veterinary Ophthalmology*.



*Above: Dr. Sydney Hall  
Left: Dr. Hannah Gafen*

# WE HEAL

## CHARLOTTE THE PIG

accidentally swallowed a fish hook at 2 in the morning. Our team at the LSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital handled that. Charlotte the Pig felt much better after our team of expert clinicians, techs, and students retrieved the fish hook, sending Charlotte home rested and ready for her next fishing trip.

## HONEY, AGE 4, WAS PLAGUED

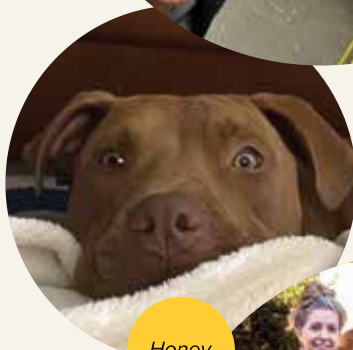
for years by allergies that worsened over time. Flare-ups of itching and red bumps, primarily on her chest and abdomen, became so intense she was seen in Dermatology to get relief. After getting her secondary skin infection under control, dermatologists tackled the underlying cause and performed an intradermal skin test, showing extensive positive reactions to allergens. Our dermatologists formulated a special vaccine specifically for Honey containing small amounts of the allergens that she is sensitive to. Honey's owner is super excited that Honey is tolerating the allergy immunotherapy therapy very well and is finally finding relief!



Charlotte

## HUCK, THE DOG, WASN'T

able to dodge a bullet when a .22-caliber pellet gun was aimed and fired at him near his home in Arnaudville, La. The bullet hit his left flank and went through his intestine seven times. Eddie Bouchereau found his dog hiding, in pain, under his house. He rushed Huck to his local veterinarian, who referred him to LSU Vet Med. Huck was diagnosed with a septic abdomen, a condition that required emergency surgery to save him. Huck was cleared to go home after a successful surgery, multiple transfusions, and a whole lot of TLC. "He is who I have come home to for the past six years. Thanks for taking good care of him," Bouchereau said.



Honey

## OTTO'S OWNER, JAKE LIMBERG,

knew something was seriously wrong when his 13-year-old dog collapsed in his backyard. Jake drove six hours from Little Rock, Ark., to Baton Rouge, La., where Otto was seen by our ER team and Small Animal Internal Medicine clinicians. Otto's bladder had ruptured and required surgery. Following his recovery, Dr. Murphy Sachse, with the help of our new Interventional Radiology service (Drs. Agostino Buono and Madeleine Stein) performed a urethral stent procedure—not widely available in Louisiana—to relieve a urethral obstruction caused by a tumor. The stent, placed using fluoroscopic guidance under brief anesthesia, was essential for Otto to urinate. "Without it, we were out of options," said Dr. Sachse, noting an immediate improvement in urine flow.



Otto

"I come all the way to Louisiana for his treatment because I have a high degree of confidence in the care he receives at LSU," Jake shared. Otto had been diagnosed with transitional cell carcinoma in 2023, undergoing a round of radiation that summer and another in 2024 with our Oncology service. "LSU has the best possible expertise and equipment to help Otto. They not only care for his needs, but mine, as well. I want to buy him as much time as possible."



Huck

### MERLIN, A 1.5-YEAR-OLD PIG

from Prairieville, La., faced a life-threatening health crisis. Disoriented and immobile, Merlin arrived at LSU Vet Med in critical condition, barely breathing. Thanks to the collaboration of our food animal, neurology, and anesthesia teams, led by Drs. Clare Scully, Colleen Embersics, Gabriel Castro-Cuellar, and Mark Kasirye, Merlin received rapid, specialized care. An MRI revealed infectious encephalitis that had caused swelling in the brain, and a targeted treatment plan was quickly put in place to save his life. Within a week, Merlin was back at home and recovering. Cases like Merlin's showcase LSU Vet Med's lifesaving ability to provide expert care across multiple specialties, all under one roof. Our team's unparalleled expertise and collaboration ensure the best chance for positive outcomes for patients in critical need.

### TOOTLES, AN 11-MONTH-OLD

Chihuahua, arrived at the LSU Neurology Service for treatment of atlantooccipital subluxation, a severe injury that occurs when the ligaments and bones that connect the skull to the cervical spine are damaged. Tootles experienced pain and difficulty walking after falling off a bed at home, which was worsened by a congenital malformation.

When he first arrived at LSU, he was paralyzed in all four legs. Tootles underwent a complex surgery to stabilize his first and second cervical vertebrae to provide a better long-term prognosis and reduce the risk of possible recurrent injury in the future. A CT was performed prior to surgery. This imaging allowed our team to determine the depth, diameter, and angle of implants that augmented stabilization. Tootles recovered well from surgery and, with the aid of our Anesthesia team, was successfully weaned off IV pain medications and was able to go home. When Tootles returned for a checkup and bandage removal, he showed significantly improved motor function in all limbs. We are so happy that his prognosis for further recovery is good!



Merlin



Tootles



Maxine



Kitty

### MAXINE SPENT HER FIRST

two years of life in a puppy mill cage. When Leigh Bonanno adopted her, she was skinny and a mass of sores. She didn't even have a name.

When Dermatology clinicians first saw Maxine, they diagnosed her with pemphigus foliaceus, an autoimmune disorder that causes the skin cells to lose their adhesion. Maxine suffered from blisters, crusting lesions, ear infections, itching, and pain. "The right diagnosis is everything. With treatment, all of her symptoms have been resolved. It seems miraculous. I had been considering a very difficult option because I didn't want to see her so miserable."

### KITTY, A NEW ZEALAND WHITE

rabbit fractured her spine and was paralyzed following a fall from her hutch. Kitty was brought to us from Florida for evaluation. "Surgery was the only treatment option," said Dr. Colleen Embersics, head of our Neurology service. Surgery would require the highest level of skill. Rabbits' bones are thin, and surgeons needed to connect and secure two vertebrae to repair her damage. The goal was to get her functional and pain-free again. The maximum time Kitty could be under anesthesia

was four hours, and our Anesthesia service worked diligently as part of the OR team. The surgery was successful, and Dr. Hugo Gonzalez, Zoo Med resident, provided stellar post-op care. Within two days, the rabbit could use her back legs. After one week, she started hopping again. Our Integrative Medicine service provided a plan to support continued healing. Raised as an emotional support animal, Kitty can now hop back into her job of comforting others.



## EquiDay brings horse enthusiasts to LSU Vet Med for a day of learning and connection

*Dr. Jonuel Cruz-Sanabria, assistant professor of equine surgery, explains to attendees acupuncture techniques to help diagnose and treat orthopedic cases and systemic diseases.*

**NEARLY 250 HORSE LOVERS**, owners, and students gathered at LSU School of Veterinary Medicine in November for EquiDay 2024, a daylong event celebrating education, outreach, and excellence in equine care. Hosted by the LSU Vet Med Equine Club, EquiDay continues to grow as a premier annual event, offering horse owners and enthusiasts of all ages access to LSU's leading equine expertise.

The event featured interactive lectures, hands-on demonstrations, and a chance for participants to connect directly with LSU Vet Med faculty, alumni, veterinary students, and equine professionals. Attendees heard talks on essential equine topics including pasture safety, nutrition, first aid, and breeding decisions. Demonstrations such as equine treadmill exercises, saddle fitting, and how to age a horse by its teeth provided practical, real-world takeaways for horse care and management.

EquiDay is designed to bridge science and practice, bringing the latest in veterinary knowledge directly to the equine community. In addition to educational content, the event fosters a welcoming environment for families, new horse owners, and seasoned professionals alike.

Thanks to a dedicated team of Equine Club members, EquiDay delivered a smooth and impactful experience. The student-led planning committee ensured that every detail—from registration and meal logistics to speaker coordination and giveaways—ran efficiently. Participants who preregistered received a free T-shirt, goody bag, and guaranteed meals.

With continued support from the LSU AgCenter and local equine professionals, EquiDay is becoming a signature event that promotes equine education, public engagement, and veterinary leadership. The turnout and enthusiasm at this year's event underscored a growing interest in equine health and wellness across Louisiana and the Gulf Coast region.

## Equine team honored with 2024 Impact Awards

**THE LSU SCHOOL OF** Veterinary Medicine Equine Health and Sports Performance (EHSP) program has long been recognized as a national leader in equine health, research, and clinical care. Now, the team's impact has been honored by The Horse Review, which presented multiple 2024 Impact Awards in November recognizing excellence across the program's faculty, staff, and research efforts.

The EHSP team earned the 2024 Research and Team Award for its contributions to biomedical studies in equine performance and disease management. Led by Dr. Frank Andrews, the team's clinical efforts and research span a wide range of equine health challenges, with the goal of improving outcomes for horses across Louisiana and beyond.

In addition to the team honor, EHSP faculty and staff members were celebrated for individual honors. Dr. Mustajab Mirza was named 2024 Veterinarian of the Year for his exceptional clinical care and commitment to advancing equine medicine. Maddie Cerise, a member of the clinical team, received the 2024 Equine Veterinary Technician of the Year award for her skill, compassion, and dedication to patient care.



Above: Dr. Mustajab Mirza

Below: Maddie Cerise,  
equine vet tech

While the EHSP team is widely known for its expertise in complex cases, Dr. Andrews emphasizes that their care extends far beyond specialty referrals. “A common misconception is that we only handle advanced or difficult cases,” he said. “In reality, we partner closely with local veterinarians and horse owners to provide comprehensive, everyday care—whether it’s in our hospital or out in the field.”

The EHSP team also operates a field service unit that brings veterinary care directly to horse owners who may not have access to transportation. This outreach is part of the team’s holistic, community-focused approach to equine health.

These honors reflect LSU Vet Med’s broader mission to serve Louisiana’s animal owners while advancing veterinary medicine through education, research, and public engagement.

## Equine Program Named Center of Excellence

**THE LOUISIANA BOARD OF REGENTS** has officially designated LSU School of Veterinary Medicine long-standing Equine Health Studies Program (EHSP) as the Center of Excellence in Equine Health and Sports Performance (EHSP CoE). Approved in December 2024, this designation marks a significant milestone in the program’s evolution and solidifies its reputation as a leader in equine care, education, and research.

Originally established in 2005 through a statutory dedication from the Louisiana State Legislature, the EHSP program has grown into a powerhouse of clinical service, research innovation, and student training. With this new designation, the EHSP CoE will enjoy organizational permanence, programmatic autonomy, and an independent operating budget—key features that will support its continued growth and impact.

“I could not be more excited about this designation, which will advance our equine enterprise to higher levels of visibility and acclaim,” said Dean Oliver Garden, LSU Vet Med. “Designation as a Center of Excellence will help advance our goal to be the premier equine educational, clinical, and research enterprise in the region, and one of the top five such programs in the world.”

Under the leadership of Dr. Frank Andrews for the past decade, the equine program has become a vital resource for Louisiana’s \$3 billion equestrian industry. Its clinical team—comprising 18 faculty members, specialized veterinary technicians, and experts in sports medicine, rehabilitation, and alternative therapies—manages over 2,500 equine cases annually. The Center also plays a critical role in bolstering Louisiana’s equine veterinary workforce through hands-on student education and mentorship.

The EHSP CoE stands at the forefront of scientific discovery, with ongoing research in areas such as Cushing’s disease and equine metabolic syndrome. To date, the program’s researchers have delivered more than 300 scientific presentations worldwide, contributing knowledge that benefits equine health on a global scale.

Beyond research and clinical care, the Center actively engages with the broader equine community. Outreach and educational efforts aim to share valuable knowledge with horse owners, veterinarians, and donors—both in Louisiana and beyond—strengthening LSU’s land-grant mission and reinforcing its role as a trusted resource.

With the DVM class size increasing to 200 students in the Class of 2029, the Center is also poised to attract more students with a passion for equine medicine. By nurturing the next generation of veterinarians, the EHSP CoE will continue shaping the future of equine health and performance across the state, the region, and the world.

## New Faculty

### NEOKLIS APOSTOLOPOULOS,



DVM, PhD,  
DECVD  
Assistant  
Professor of  
Dermatology in  
VCS

### NANCY MITROPOULOU,



DVM, PhD,  
DECVECC  
Assistant  
Professor of  
Emergency and  
Critical Care in  
VCS

### SARA LYLE, DVM, MS, PhD (LSU 2008), DACT



Associate  
Professor of  
Theriogenology  
in VCS

### SHELLY LILES FONTENOT,



DVM (LSU  
2005)  
Assistant  
Professor  
of Shelter  
Medicine in VCS

### AGOSTINO BUONO,



DVM, DACVIM  
Assistant  
Professor of  
Small Animal  
Internal  
Medicine in VCS

### MICHAEL ST. BLANC,



DVM, MS (LSU  
2017, 2024),  
DACVS  
Assistant  
Professor of  
Equine Surgery  
in VCS



*Dr. Callie Smith makes art at one of the monthly Art Break for All sessions.*



## LSU Museum of Art and LSU Vet Med collaborate to bring new experiences to broader audiences

### IN AN EXCITING INTERDISCIPLINARY

collaboration, the LSU School of Veterinary Medicine and the LSU Museum of Art (LSU MOA) have teamed up to bring fresh and engaging experiences to each other. This partnership aims to offer unique activities for both the LSU Vet Med community and visitors to the LSU MOA.

### ART-MAKING AT LSU VET MED

LSU Vet Med is bringing creative experiences to its community through the monthly Art Break for All program, which offers a stress-free art-making opportunity. This initiative allows participants to explore their creativity in a relaxed, enjoyable environment.

“Well-being initiatives like this program create an environment where individuals can recharge, find joy in creativity, and build deeper connections with others in the veterinary community,” said Kayla Baudoin, well-being manager at LSU Vet Med. “It provides a much-needed outlet for self-expression and relaxation.”

Each month, participants choose from a featured activity or engage in free creative play. Activities include sewing mini wall tapestries, printmaking, and meditative painting, with all supplies provided. Dr. Callie Smith, LSU MOA educator and public programs manager, highlights the variety of choices available: “We offer different options to encourage creativity and connection among the LSU Vet Med community,” she said.

### RAPTORS VISIT LSU MOA

As part of the collaboration, LSU Vet Med’s resident raptors (such as owls, hawks, and eagles) and

their handlers visited the LSU Museum of Art for a special event. This event coincided with LSU MOA’s “Golden Legacy: Original Art from 80 Years of Golden Books” exhibition, featuring many beloved animal characters. The raptors made a special appearance at the museum in April during the monthly Free First Sunday Program.

“The presence of the birds in conjunction with our animal-themed exhibition at LSU MOA helps raise awareness of the important work being done by LSU Vet Med’s Raptor Program,” said Dr. Callie Smith. “It also promotes better wildlife stewardship and showcases the vital role the Wildlife Hospital of Louisiana plays in wildlife rehabilitation. The hospital treats approximately 1,400 cases annually, with a 73% release rate for treatable cases.”

The raptors are cared for by veterinary students who volunteer at LSU Vet Med’s Wildlife Hospital. They are the birds that come to LSU Vet Med’s Wildlife Hospital for treatment but are unable to be released because they can no longer fend for themselves in the wild. They serve as ambassadors for wildlife conservation and education.



*Raptor co-chair Holly Casper showcases resident raptor Shelly, a great horned owl, at the LSU MOA's "Golden Legacy: Original Art from 80 years of Golden Books" exhibition.*

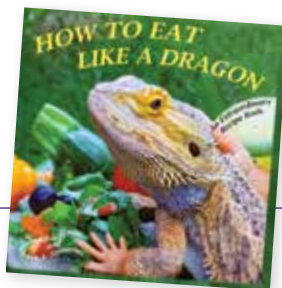
## Faculty member named president-elect of AVMLA

**ROB SIMPSON, DVM, JD**, assistant professor and director of professional development education, has been elected to the American Veterinary Medical Law Association board as the president-elect, which is a three-year term including the presidency.

The American Veterinary Medical Law Association (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. Our mission is to enhance the understanding and application of veterinary law through education and collaboration.

"As president-elect, I began my three-year term in July 2023, which includes serving as president and then immediate past president. In my role as president-elect, I am responsible for chairing the conference committee. This year, we are excited to present a program focused on regulatory laws in Washington, D.C., coinciding with the AVMA conference. My primary goal as president-elect

and later president of AVMLA is to expand our membership base, starting with students in both veterinary and legal fields. During my first term, I ensured that students receive free membership, and I plan to continue this initiative through outreach efforts to grow our community and strengthen our impact," Dr. Simpson said.



**FUN FACT:** Dr. Mandi Lopez, director of the Laboratory for Equine and Comparative Orthopedic Research and professor at LSU Vet Med, wrote a book—a recipe book. Inspired by an overflow of vegetables from feeding her bearded dragon, ZuToo, and also a desire to encourage healthy family meals, she and her sister, Lisa A. Simmons, hatched the idea for a recipe book. "How to Eat Like a Dragon" includes over 30 recipes along with bearded dragon facts. For more information, email [mlopez@lsu.edu](mailto:mlopez@lsu.edu).

### NEW FACULTY

#### FRANCISCO "PACO" MORALES, DVM



Assistant Professor of Equine Surgery in VCS

#### LAUREN VINCENT,



DVM (LSU 2022)  
Teaching Instructor of Anesthesiology in VCS

#### ROB SIMPSON, DVM, JD



Assistant Professor and Director for Professional Development Education in VCS

#### SHANG SU, PhD



Assistant Professor of Cancer Biology in CBS

#### FABIO BORGES VIGIL, PhD



Assistant Professor of Neuroscience in CBS

#### NADIA RICHMOND, DVM



(LSU 2020), DACVP  
Assistant Professor of Clinical Pathology in VCS

## Celebrating LSU Vet Med's First Petco Love and Blue Buffalo grant recipient, Paisley, who thrived for six years post-cancer treatment

**PAISLEY, A KING CHARLES** Cavalier spaniel, was diagnosed with a brain tumor at 4 years old and was treated at LSU Vet Med thanks to a grant from Petco Love and Blue Buffalo last fall.

Julie Philippus, of Covington, La., received a double blow when she learned that her dog, Paisley, had cancer just a few months after losing her father and business partner to cancer in 2018.

Julie first knew something was wrong when she noticed that Paisley was yelping when jumping off the couch. One morning, she started vomiting, shaking, and walking in circles.

"We called our vet, who referred us to South Paws Veterinary Surgical Specialists in Mandeville for an emergency MRI. We were told that Paisley had a recurring brain tumor that was inoperable. That was unacceptable. Paisley was only 4 years old," Julie said.

Remarkably, in October 2024, Paisley celebrated her 11th birthday—a milestone that seemed impossible at the start of Paisley's healing journey.

Reaching that joyous moment took several critical steps. South Paws referred her to Mississippi State University College of Veterinary Medicine to consult with neurosurgeon Dr. Andy Shores for a second opinion. He performed transfrontal craniotomy surgery the next day to remove Paisley's brain tumor. Soon afterward, Julie said Paisley was playing like an energetic puppy again.

Julie was informed that the tumor would grow back, and in fact, it did return within four months, as evidenced by a follow-up MRI at LSU Vet Med.

"We wondered, 'What now?' We were looking for help," Julie said.

At LSU Vet Med, she met with Dr. Jayme Looper, professor of veterinary radiation oncology, who saw Paisley and presented Julie with treatment options. According to a study published in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, dogs that underwent tumor resection (surgery) alone and



Petco Love and Blue Buffalo continue to support pet owners by helping with the cost of pet cancer treatment, investing in the top veterinarian oncology universities for pet cancer treatment funds. Since 2010, Petco Love and Blue Buffalo have invested more than \$20 million in the fight against pet cancer.

survived surgery had a median survival time of seven months. Dogs that underwent tumor resection followed by radiation therapy had a median survival time of 16.5 months.

Radiation therapy as a follow-up to surgery was recommended by both Drs. Looper and Shores, and it was a costly treatment option. Dr. Looper told Julie about the Petco Love and Blue Buffalo grant and said that Paisley would be a solid candidate for the grant. Paisley was LSU Vet Med's first recipient of the Petco Love and Blue Buffalo grant to help make cancer treatment available.

"I was thrilled to have this lifesaving option," Julie said.

Paisley, then age 5, started radiation treatments in March 2019 to remove any remaining nodules. She underwent 20 rounds of radiation treatments administered Mondays through Fridays for a full month. Paisley was able to enjoy life after her treatments at LSU Vet Med.

"Dr. Looper really saved her life," Julie said.

In July 2024, Julie wrote to Dr. Looper, saying, "I wanted to let you know how much time we have been able to get back with your help. If you recall, we were hoping for at least 2.5 additional years, and so we are beyond grateful. I thank you from the bottom of our hearts for putting your faith in her and allowing us



*Puppy Paisley (left) and Paisley at the beach (right) was LSU Vet Med's first recipient of the grant, a game changer for some clients faced with tough decisions.*

the opportunity to participate in the Petco Love and Blue Buffalo grant program. It saved her life and gave us another 5.5 wonderful, happy years with a vibrant, healthy dog again for our family to enjoy."

Dr. Looper said, "It was wonderful to hear from Julie, and I was so happy to hear how well Paisley did for so long."

Last summer, Paisley started slowing down and showing signs of a possible recurrence for the first time since treatment. Julie reached out to Dr. Looper for her input while working with her local veterinarian, Dr. Kristen Boston, at Covington Veterinary Hospital, co-owned with her husband, Dr. Gerard

Boston, 1990 graduate of LSU Vet Med. Last summer, Julie brought Paisley back to LSU Vet Med to see Dr. Looper. No additional surgery or radiation was planned, as Paisley was doing well on medications for symptom management.

"With Dr. Looper's help, she was able to live a full, happy life," Julie said.

Petco Love, a national nonprofit saving lives, has made it possible for LSU Vet Med to better even more lives with grants for cancer treatment for clients who otherwise would not be able to afford it for their animals.

"These funds have allowed us to save many lives. Life-saving treatments can be expensive, and this grant is a game changer for clients faced with difficult decisions for their sick pets," Dr. Looper said.

LSU Vet Med's Cancer Treatment Unit, founded in

1998, offers a variety of treatment options tailored to pets' individual needs. The unit offers two major services: medical oncology and radiation oncology.

Prior to press time, we learned from Julie that Paisley passed away earlier this year. In a note to Paisley's clinical team, Julie said, "Thank you for the additional years you gave us with her. Your generosity and willingness to help save Paisley will never be forgotten."



For further information about the LSU Vet Med Cancer Treatment Unit and applying for funding, visit our [Oncology Service webpage](#) or email [lsuoncology@lsu.edu](mailto:lsuoncology@lsu.edu).

## NEW FACULTY

### RACHEL JANIA, DVM, DACVR



Assistant Professor of Diagnostic Imaging in VCS

### CINDY ELSTON, DVM, MPH



Assistant Professor of Veterinary Practice Skills in VCS

### SVETLINA ALEKSANDROVA,



DVM, DECVD Assistant Professor of Dermatology in VCS

### GILLIAN DECLERCQ,



BVSc, MSc Assistant Professor of Veterinary Practice Skills in VCS

### WESLEY BURNSIDE,



BVMS, MRCVS Associate Director of the Division of Laboratory Animal Medicine and Chief Clinical Veterinarian in PBS

## Celebrating excellence in research, teaching, and clinical care

**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.

Dr. **Melanie Mironovich** achieved a major career milestone by completing her ophthalmology residency and passing her national board exam, earning diplomate status in the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists. Dr. **Madeleine Stein** also joined the ranks of board-certified specialists, becoming a Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine in Small Animal Internal Medicine.

LSU Vet Med's faculty and students continue to advance veterinary science through impactful research. Drs. **Lorrie Hale-Mitchell** and **Ryan Smith**, along with alumna Dr. **Reanna Cantrall**, published research in the American Journal of Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine. Dr. **Elise Barras**, an LSU DVM and MS graduate, published a paper on improving Dubia roach nutrition—work conducted in the Mitchell lab and co-authored by LSU students.

Graduate student **Ivan Martinez-Espinoza** was awarded a 2024–25 LSU Dissertation Year Fellowship for his research on antiviral immunity. **Demetrius McAtee** received the prestigious Heidi Lott Scholarship, and **Ignitius Lim** earned a competitive training scholarship at the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, Mass.

In the field of zoological medicine, LSU made an impressive showing at the 2024 Association of Reptile and Amphibian Veterinarians conference. Undergraduate **Ashleigh Godke**, DVM candidate **Amy Bitter**, and PhD student **Graciela Aguilar** presented groundbreaking research on reptile and amphibian health, while Dr. **Mark Mitchell**, their mentor, contributed his own work on UVB exposure in cockatiels and sedation in skinks.

Recognition of leadership came in many forms. Dr. **Lorrie Hale-Mitchell** received the 2024 Outstanding Achievement Award in Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine at an international conference. Dr. **Tammy Dugas** was selected as one of LSU's Southeastern Conference Academic Leadership Development Program Fellows. Meanwhile,



*Demetrius McAtee (right) with Dr. Alexandra Noël (left)*

**Amy Geeding** was promoted to director of veterinary nursing, reflecting her long-standing commitment since joining the team in 2013.

Public engagement and advocacy also flourished. Dr. **Weishan Huang** represented LSU at the 2024 Rally for Medical Research Hill Day in

Washington, D.C., advocating for National Institutes of Health funding. Dr. **Jeremy Delcambre** contributed to a national podcast on humane use of animals in veterinary education.

Students **Carlos Zervigon** and **Will Sitterson** demonstrated perseverance



*LSU K9 Officer Laika celebrates a decade of service with her LSUPD handler, Dr. Nancy Welborn, and Elizabeth Arnold, vet tech.*



*Ignitius Lim*

and compassion by completing the Chicago Marathon, raising over \$3,000 for animal welfare.

K9 Officer Laika, a beloved member of the LSU Police Department, was celebrated for a decade of service, with care provided by Dr. **Nancy Welborn** and vet tech **Elizabeth Arnold**.

From published studies to prestigious fellowships, from leadership honors to charitable achievements, LSU Vet Med continues to push the boundaries of veterinary and biomedical sciences. This extraordinary season of accolades reflects the talent, teamwork, and tireless dedication that defines our community.



*Carlos Zervigon  
and Will Sitterson*



## LA MOO U inspires future leaders in cattle industry

**IN AUGUST 2024**, LSU Vet Med, in partnership with the LSU AgCenter and the Louisiana Cattlemen's Association (LCA), welcomed the next generation of agricultural leaders to campus for LA MOO U. The annual summer camp educates youth ages 8 to 18 on cattle production, animal health, and career opportunities in the cattle industry.

Camp participants spent the day touring LSU AgCenter's beef and sheep units, the meats lab, and the LSU Dairy Store. They also visited LSU Diagnostics and took part in hands-on activities on the LSU Vet Med campus, including a dystocia (calving difficulty) lab and milk replacer exercises.

The evening concluded with a cooking competition hosted in the Lameness Pavilion, where participants

prepared beef-based meals using ingredients from the LSU AgCenter meat store. The event served as a fun, practical finale that celebrated Louisiana-grown beef and highlighted the full farm-to-table experience.

Dean Oliver Garden delivered remarks and served as a judge for the cookout competition. "Events like LA MOO U demonstrate how agriculture and veterinary medicine are deeply connected," he said. "It was inspiring to see young people so engaged in learning, problem-solving, and connecting with professionals who share their passion for animal health and rural life."

The event reflects LSU Vet Med's ongoing commitment to education, community engagement, and support for Louisiana's \$3 billion cattle industry.

## NEW FACULTY

**RON MCLAUGHLIN**,  
DVM, DVSc  
(Honors), DACVS  
Professor of  
Small Animal  
Orthopedic  
Surgery in VCS



**KIMBERLY BOYKIN**, DVM, MS,  
PhD (LSU 2019,  
2024)  
Assistant  
Professor of  
Wildlife Medicine  
& Surgery in VCS



**KARLA FRAGA**, DVM  
(LSU 2019)  
Assistant  
Professor of  
Small Animal  
Emergency and  
Critical Care in  
VCS



**ALEXANDER LEE**, PhD  
(LSU 2024)  
Assistant  
Professor of  
Anatomy in CBS



**TIANYI ZHANG**, PhD  
Research  
Assistant  
Professor in PBS





## Inviting the world in: Open House 2025

**ON SATURDAY, FEB. 1,** LSU Vet Med hosted its 42nd Open House event. This family-friendly event open to the public provided attendees with the chance to peek into the world of veterinary medicine and biomedical science.

The event included a variety of activities allowing participants to get a hands-on experience with the world of veterinary medicine. Some activities included a petting zoo, animal demonstrations, and, a teddy bear repair station, in which children could get their stuffed animals “sutured” like real patients. Students, staff, and local animal and health organizations provided exhibits reflecting the profession of veterinary medicine. Visitors also had a chance to tour LSU Vet Med’s facilities.

Throughout the day, attendees met expert veterinarians and veterinary students who shared their knowledge and passion for animal care. The open house also showcased the incredible work done at LSU Vet Med, from groundbreaking medical research to compassionate animal care, emphasizing

the importance of community involvement.

“Our annual Open House was a magnificent event that attracted almost 6,000 visitors to LSU Vet Med,” said Dean Oliver Garden. “From raptors to snakes to cats to cows; from clinical pathology to parasitology; from sheep herding to galloping horses to a petting zoo – we had it all.”

Participating groups included BREC’s Baton Rouge Zoo, the Baton Rouge Police Department K-9 Unit, the LSU Museum of Natural Science, Companion Animal Alliance, Magic Happens Rabbit Rescue, the Baton Rouge Kennel Club, and many more.

A special thanks to the sponsors for the event, Acadian Ambulance, Campus Federal Credit Union, and Cat

*Attendees were given the opportunity to “perform surgery” on stuffed animals.*



Care Center, owned by LSU Vet Med alumna Dr. Lacie Lee, whose support helped make the event possible.

With multiple generations of families attending, Open House was truly an intergenerational event. Whether visitors were considering a career in veterinary medicine or simply wanted to explore the world of animal health, the event provided an exciting opportunity to discover the important work being done at LSU Vet Med.

*A kid poses with a kid at the petting zoo.*



*Dr. Lacie Lee, Cat Care Center, was a sponsor of Open House and helped make the event possible. She is pictured here with her team from her feline-exclusive veterinary hospital.*

“A huge thanks to everyone involved in delivering this showcase event, and to our generous sponsors and supporters for making it all possible,” said Dean Garden. “I couldn’t be prouder of our whole community at LSU Vet Med.”



## Celebrating the careers of two remarkable people

### WE HONORED TWO EXTRAORDINARY

members of our community: Dr. Arthur Penn and Thaya Stoufflet, who retired this year. Their combined contributions span over 70 years of dedication to science, education, and discovery.

Dr. Arthur Penn, who retired in January, leaves behind an exceptional 47-year academic legacy, including nearly three decades at LSU. As founder and director of the LSU Inhalation Research Facility, Dr. Penn’s groundbreaking work in inhalation toxicology (particularly on second-hand smoke and airborne pollutants) positioned

LSU as a national leader in environmental health research. He was equally revered as a mentor, educator, and collaborator, remembered as much for his wisdom as for the coffee-fueled conversations that energized his lab.

Thaya Stoufflet retired after 26 impactful years at LSU Vet Med. Beginning her journey in the Pathology department, she played a pivotal role in canine research alongside Dr. Steve Gaunt (LSU 1977), professor emeritus of clinical pathology, before taking on leadership at GeneLab as lab manager. Her tireless commitment and technical expertise have been essential to both veterinary medicine and biomedical research at LSU.



### SUBMIT NEWS

**SANDRA SARR** [sarr1@lsu.edu](mailto:sarr1@lsu.edu)

A background image of thick, swirling vapor smoke in shades of orange, red, and brown, filling the top half of the page.

# VAPING,

# PREGNANCY,

*and lung disease risk*

Dr. Alexandra Noël  
leads NIH-funded  
research in a quest to  
improve public health

BY SANDRA SARR







**D**r. Alexandra Noël is on a mission to conduct fundamental research to help improve public health in Louisiana and beyond, uncovering how vaping during pregnancy affects the respiratory health of both mothers and their offspring. Her groundbreaking research is paving the way for better understanding, prevention, and treatment of potential lung diseases following gestational exposures to vaping products.

In March 2025, she 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.

According to the National Institutes of Health, vaping involves a battery-powered device called an e-cigarette that heats a liquid into a vapor that can be inhaled. The vapor may contain nicotine (the addictive drug in tobacco), flavoring, and other chemicals. E-cigarettes can also be used with marijuana, hash oil, or other substances. NIH warns that vaping may pose serious and avoidable health risks. Exposure to nicotine during youth can lead to addiction and cause long-term harm to brain development. The vapor can also contain toxins (including ones that cause cancer) and tiny particles that are harmful when breathed in.

“When people vape, they are inhaling an aerosol (vapor) containing nicotine, chemicals, and metals, including copper. We think it plays a role in immune responses and the development of asthma and are looking at how vaping impacts the respiratory health of offspring when exposed during gestation,” said Dr. Noël, associate professor of comparative biomedical sciences at LSU School of Veterinary Medicine and director of its Inhalation Research Facility.

#### **MILESTONE RESEARCH**

Dr. Noël's research is a pivotal first step for early management of asthma development for prenatally ENDS-exposed infants. The renewable NIH grant provides \$450,000 per year for five years. It is Dr. Noël's first NIH RO1 grant, a major milestone for any biomedical researcher, especially a young or early-career investigator.



“This research project is a long time in the making. I’ve studied the effects of vaping for many years. Now, I am focusing on the mechanisms by which the damage occurs,” said Dr. Noël, who has chosen to conduct her work at LSU Vet Med, a research powerhouse ranked #3 in National Institutes of Health (NIH) research funding per faculty member and #9 in total

NIH research funding overall among veterinary schools in the U.S. Dr. Noël’s lab has been continuously funded by the NIH since 2018. She has led several extramurally funded research projects totaling more than \$4 million.

The number of women using ENDS during pregnancy in the U.S. is on the rise, up to a half million annually, despite growing evidence of adverse

effects in newborns.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System, approximately 7% of pregnant women in the United States use cigarette devices during pregnancy. There is, however, no scientific evidence to support e-cigarette use as being “safe” during pregnancy. Little is



*Dr. Noël presents her mentor, Dr. Arthur Penn, with a retirement gift. She succeeds him as director of the LSU Inhalation Research Facility.*

known about the effects of fetal exposures to e-cigarette aerosols on lungs.

### HEALTH RISKS

Fetal development is a sensitive time, a window of vulnerability to toxic exposures, which can lead to lifelong respiratory health consequences. Epidemiological studies suggest that maternal vaping, estimated at 7% of pregnant women in the U.S., is associated with infants born small-for-gestational-age, a clinical indicator for increased risk of complications in lung diseases.

The long-term respiratory health effects in these offspring, however, are unclear. Dr. Noël's research aims to change that by pinpointing the ways in which prenatal exposure to electronic nicotine delivery system aerosol modulates the

neonatal pulmonary immune system to prime the lungs for allergic asthma. Although the metals used in ENDS coils and atomizers vary across types of devices, copper is in the top two most frequently detected metals in ENDS aerosols, and in a woman, transplacental transfer of copper from secondhand ENDS exposures was documented. Copper has allergic sensitizing properties and its accumulation in tissue decreases DNA methylation, which can affect how that molecule functions in the body, potentially turning genes on or off, influencing hormone production, or affecting cellular signaling.

Overall, this research will help determine blood-based biomarkers of prenatal ENDS exposures, a pivotal first step for early management of lung diseases for the half million prenatally ENDS-exposed infants born each year in the U.S.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF FUNDAMENTAL RESEARCH

NIH fundamental research has led to 153 Nobel Prizes and 198 Lasker Prizes (often dubbed “America’s Nobel,” it honors groundbreaking contributions to our understanding of human disease).

“This work is based on the research I’ve conducted here since 2017. My published data reinforced my focus on Interleukin-10 (IL-10),” she said. IL-10 is a cytokine with a crucial role in regulating the immune system, particularly in modulating inflammation.

## LSU-OLOL RESEARCH

Dr. Noël also is part of a research program between LSU and Our Lady of the Lake Health on a related topic. The Collaboration in Action Program (CAP) awarded \$1.2 million to five winning teams in an inaugural round of research funding, which includes Dr. Noël’s respiratory health research. She leads an interdisciplinary team that uses experimental models to study the social and behavioral factors associated with maternal vaping, as well as vaping’s impacts on birth outcomes and the development of asthma in offspring.

“In Louisiana, the use of vaping products or electronic cigarettes has a high



Read Dr. Alexandra Noël’s published research at:  
[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/myncbi/alexandra.noel.1/bibliography/public](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/myncbi/alexandra.noel.1/bibliography/public)

prevalence among women of reproductive age,” Dr. Noël said. “We already know maternal smoking negatively impacts neonatal respiratory health, but we don’t know if this also holds true for maternal vaping. I’m looking at the adverse effects of vaping during pregnancy.”

One of her team’s hypotheses is that intended pregnancies, women who plan to get pregnant, lead to a higher rate of vaping cessation and more favorable birth outcomes.

“Understanding the effects of maternal vaping is of critical relevance for the health of

## UNDERSTANDING THE EFFECTS OF MATERNAL VAPING IS OF CRITICAL RELEVANCE FOR THE HEALTH OF LOUISIANA CITIZENS.

Louisiana citizens, as behaviors like vaping during pregnancy ultimately impact neonatal respiratory health, including chronic lung diseases like asthma,” Dr. Noël said.

Dr. Noël’s interdisciplinary team includes Dr. Heather Rackin, associate professor of sociology at LSU and social demographer whose research focuses on fertility intentions, socioeconomic inequality in family context, and population health and well-being.

Their study is providing a framework to identify high-risk populations of pregnant women and their children in Louisiana and develop targeted preventive and interventional strategies.

Because e-cigarettes, or vaping, first appeared on the market in 2007, much remains unknown about its impact, including the chemicals that make up the vapor inhaled and how they affect respiratory health over the long term.

LSU and Our Lady of the Lake Health, LSU’s CAP, work together to fight heart disease, cancer, accidents, and chronic respiratory diseases, all leading causes of death in Louisiana that impact its citizens disproportionately.

“This first investment demonstrates how top-notch university research combined with strong and strategic hospital partnerships bring better health to the people of Louisiana and beyond,”

said Robert Twilley, vice president of research and economic development at LSU. “Our shared commitment to building and supporting winning research teams will translate to many new discoveries and solutions in years to come.”

Dr. Noël has been a member of the LSU Vet Med faculty since March 2017. She earned her PhD from the Université de Montréal, Faculté de Médecine in 2013. Her research focuses on the production and characterization of aerosols, including e-cigarette aerosols, secondhand smoke, engineered nanoparticles, ultrafine or fine particles, as well as inhalation and developmental toxicology. She delves into the fundamental mechanisms at the epigenetic, molecular, and cellular levels that underlie the developmental origins of

health and disease in relation to respiratory effects caused by distinct emerging inhaled environmental pollutants.

### LIFE’S WORK

Dr. Noël remembers her parents asking, “Why study cigarette smoking? We know it’s bad for you.” She nevertheless pursued her interest in lung disease and came from Montreal to LSU Vet Med as a post-doctoral researcher studying nanotechnology and nanoparticles in pulmonary health more than a decade ago.

As Dr. Noël honed her expertise in cigarette tobacco exposure, vaping was gathering momentum. Suddenly, she was able to apply her scientific knowledge to addressing and treating a new and pressing problem.

“It’s timely work. I didn’t expect to contribute on this magnitude. It’s a case of being at the right place at the right time,” she said.

She credits working with mentor Arthur Penn, PhD, retired professor of toxicology in the Department of Comparative Biomedical Sciences and former director of the Inhalation Research Facility at LSU Vet Med, and the school’s facilities as positive factors supporting her research efforts. Dr. Noël succeeded Dr. Penn as

director of the Inhalation Research Facility.

“People initially thought vaping was safer than cigarette smoking. I decided to test it. Claims are made that vaping is a reduced risk compared to cigarettes, but when compared with breathing air—no, it’s not safe. We could see in the lab that it wasn’t. Inhaling vapor is harmful,” she said.

“You can’t really predict the subject of a lifelong work. There are always emerging areas,” said Dr. Noël.

As for vaping, she said the general public believes it isn’t as bad as it is.

“A claim cannot be made that it’s harmless. Research will provide the proof,” said Dr. Noël, whose continued research uncovers answers for the betterment of public health.

FEATURE





# DR. TANNER HERNANDEZ, MEDICAL DIRECTOR, COMPANION ANIMAL ALLIANCE

At the forefront of contemporary  
animal shelter medicine

BY SANDRA SARR



**T**anner Hernandez never planned to become a veterinarian. Growing up on a rural Louisiana farm, he wanted to be a teacher like his mother. Now, the 2020 LSU School of Veterinary Medicine graduate is both—and more. As medical director at Companion Animal Alliance (CAA), a nonprofit open-intake shelter for East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana, he is a leader in contemporary shelter medicine, a profession that wasn't fully recognized as an official veterinary specialty until March 2023 by the American Veterinary Medical Association's American Board of Veterinary Specialties. He is one of the youngest medical directors serving one of the largest animal shelters in Louisiana.

LSU Vet Med Communications Manager Sandra Sarr spoke with Dr. Hernandez about the challenges and rewards of his work, and his vision for the future of shelter medicine.



*All in a days work  
Page 28: In the cat  
adoption area after  
making rounds.  
Above: Performing  
a neuter surgery in  
CAA's surgical center.*

### WHY SHELTER MEDICINE?

I definitely didn't know that I wanted to practice shelter medicine. That's not what my plan was for my life. I had a job back home in Natchitoches, La., at a small mixed-animal practice. I met my wife during my clinical year and decided to stay in Baton Rouge. Because of COVID-19, clinics were not hiring, so I looked to see what was offered at LSU Vet Med. I knew it would give me high-quality, high-volume veterinary skills and provide exposure to many different species. I got to see all kinds of cases serving at shelters like Lafourche, West Baton Rouge, Iberville, Tangipahoa, Walker, Companion Animal Alliance (East Baton Rouge),

and Dixon Correctional Institute in Jackson, La. I like being an advocate for people and animals who have no one to advocate for them. Many we serve are people who don't have good access to care. The bottom line is a lot of people can't afford basic veterinary care like vaccines, spay-neuter procedures, heartworm tests, and preventatives for their animals.

### EXPANDING VETERINARY SERVICES TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY

In 2023, the East Baton Rouge Metro Council passed an ordinance that was revised by Councilman Darryl Hurst to make it possible for Companion Animal Alliance to provide members of the public

care for their pets at low or no cost. Previous ordinances allowed CAA to help only those animals impounded at the shelter. Now, it's easier for us to help more pets and pet owners in underserved areas within East Baton Rouge Parish. The change makes affordable veterinary care accessible and helps keep animals in their homes.

### OVERCROWDING IN THE SHELTER

This past year, in 2024, we took in 9,495 animals, one of our highest intake years ever. This doesn't include TNR (trap, neuter, and release) Sundays we do for community cats, surgeries on about 80 extra cats per month. CAA was designed to take in around



**I LIKE BEING  
AN ADVOCATE  
FOR ANIMALS  
AND PEOPLE  
WHO HAVE  
NO ONE TO  
ADVOCATE  
FOR THEM.**

*Kathleen Elofson,  
LSU Vet Med fourth-  
year student, and  
Dr. Lynzy Rochelle,  
LSU Vet Med  
Shelter Medicine  
intern, examine a  
dog in the care of  
Companion Animal  
Alliance.*



7,000 animals a year when the building was erected in 2018. During our heaviest intake, we have to temporarily house animals in kennels in hallways and in overflow kennels outdoors, something we don't want to do. At times like these, we put out emergency appeals for national transports and fosters. Transports are extremely competitive, so we often rely heavily on our foster base. We've been fortunate to have lots of community support, often clearing out the shelter prior to large disasters.

#### **STEMMING THE TIDE, A STRATEGIC APPROACH**

By running reports on parish zip codes, we can focus on serving those areas from where we receive the most

animals. When our Pets for Life program started, the 70805 zip code was where most of our intake came from, and it correlated with high poverty rates. When you overlay that map with vet clinics, there are hardly any in the low-income areas. If nobody else fills the need, we need to do it.

The best way to stem the tide of unwanted pets in shelters is to build a rapport with the community. People need to know that you're there to help their pets stay healthy. It's important to advocate for legislation that promotes animal welfare, and that gets enforced. Louisiana has a long way to go when it comes to animal welfare laws, but we are making strides every day to improve the lives of animals

**MAKING A  
DIFFERENCE:  
LAST YEAR, HE  
TAUGHT ANATOMY  
AT BATON ROUGE  
COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE IN  
THE VET TECH  
PROGRAM, AND  
ALSO TEACHES  
AT LSU VET MED.  
HE WORKS WITH  
DOG PEOPLE  
OF LIVINGSTON,  
A NONPROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
HOSTING HIGH-  
VOLUME SPAY AND  
NEUTER EVENTS,  
THROUGHOUT  
EACH MONTH.**

---

on a legislative level. I serve on the legislative committee of the Louisiana Veterinary Medical Association, and we deal with some of these issues. Law enforcement agencies typically handle animal cruelty and neglect calls when there's no animal control agency, but they often have other priorities. I have seen countless cases of extreme emaciation, chronic conditions unaddressed, and animals that have never been socialized. These animals have taught me that there are so many worse things than death.

#### **DAY IN THE LIFE OF CAA'S MEDICAL DIRECTOR**

In the morning when I arrive at the shelter, I begin by walking the entire shelter, seeing every animal in our care with walk-by kennel exams. Our daily population typically remains around 200 dogs and 50 to 100 cats on-site. I mark down animals that need medications or behavior modifiers and then move on to our more involved cases, identified as needing more in-depth diagnostics (X-rays, bloodwork, orthopedic exams, etc.). While we are maintaining our in-house population, I also manage any emergency cases the shelter sees. Commonly, these are animals in our foster care system, recently adopted animals, or animals being picked up by animal

control that are in dire need of attention. On top of these responsibilities, I have to manage a team of veterinary technicians and veterinarians, while still contributing to my upper management role in the shelter. Recently, I was able to hire a clinic manager, a veterinary intern, and have continued to receive support from LSU's Community Outreach and Shelter Medicine Departments, making these tasks more doable. My job has a lot of moving parts, and I have to be good at a lot of different things. Veterinarians are the backbone of improving things in shelters, and so I try to do my best each day that I am at work.

#### **MAKING TREATMENT DECISIONS WITH LIMITED RESOURCES**

The kind of medicine I practice involves a spectrum of care approach, offering a range of choices to clients. The shelter has limited resources, so I take a problem and decide what is the best treatment option for the animal and our budget. We have to be able to treat the population as well as pay our staff. The animal's quality of life is always the first priority when I make decisions.

#### **SPECTRUM OF CARE**

Coming from a shelter med background, I'm excited about the spectrum of care approach offering treatment options at different cost levels. Just because you can't afford a \$3,000 treatment doesn't mean you're a bad pet owner. It just means that you're not a pet owner who can provide that. So, there must be ways to get other treatment options that can still provide your animal with a good quality of life. There is always a gold standard of treatment, but when owners cannot afford this treatment, we follow our veterinary oath and figure out a way to get the animal care within the owner's capacity. This tests our creativity as veterinarians. At CAA, we don't believe that pet ownership is just for certain people. Every person, regardless of income, should be able to have companionship with an animal if they want it, but we have to be there to support them at the level of care they can provide.



*Drs. Hernandez and Wolfson on a recent visit at LSU Vet Med. He consults her regularly.*

## NO-KILL SHELTERS AND SAVE RATES

There's a lot of talk about save rates and no-kill shelters. Focusing on euthanasia rates is not a fair way to think about shelter medicine. Those of us in this profession want to do what's best for the animals, and sometimes that is euthanasia when it will relieve physical and/or mental suffering. We see animals that sit in the shelter for a very long time lose their mind, no matter how many behavior modifiers, enrichment, foster homes, and walks we provide. Those are the hardest euthanasias, the ones that are behavior related because nobody's choosing

them no matter what we do to network them or try to get them out. A lot of behavior problems would be solved if they were in a home with a normal routine. We do what's right for that animal—even when it affects our euthanasia rates.

## WHEN EUTHANASIA IS THE MOST COMPASSIONATE OPTION

I can't think of anything worse than to be in constant pain while everything I've

# LSU Shelter Medicine Program led by Dr. Wendy Wolfson

**LSU VET MED'S SHELTER** Medicine Program was developed by Dr. Wendy Wolfson in 2007 using a generous grant from the Humane Society of the United States, now called Humane World for Animals. Dr. Wolfson remains at the helm and the program is currently sustained by grants. The program provides a comprehensive educational experience for veterinary students in the setting of local animal shelters.

Students gain valuable veterinary medical experience by working under direct supervision of veterinary school faculty to serve the needs of unowned pets in animal shelters. Animal shelters in south Louisiana have become the primary educational settings. The program addresses spay and neuter, management, infectious disease outbreaks, and preventative medicine for pets housed in shelter settings.

## DR. HERNANDEZ ON WENDY'S TRAVELING MEDICINE BAG: GETTING MAXIMUM BENEFIT WITH LESS

"Much of what I do now is because of Dr. Wendy Wolfson. I would not be as strong if I didn't have her mentorship. I still ask her questions all the time. She's one of the original shelter medicine people, and she's done so much for this profession. It makes me really happy that I'm a part of her and I can carry on her work in shelter med. I remember going to shelters with her and she would have a big bag of medicine. We'd see cases, and she'd ask, 'What are you going to do?' I'd say, 'Well, let me look in your bag.' I'd dig through her bag and pick out the medicines that I felt would work. Wendy's bag reminded me of a Santa Claus bag. I'm telling you, she had all kinds of stuff in there. At Dixon Correctional Institute, they didn't have a lot of medicines because it's a prison. So, I'd dig through the bag, offer what we had, give instructions, and check back the next week. Wendy and I still help rescue organizations who don't have regular vets. All of us shelter vets share some responsibility for these shelters and help where we can."



An interview with Dr. Wendy Wolfson will be published and the full interview will be featured as part of an oral history series for the Williams Center for Oral Health, LSU Libraries Special Collection.



*The Companion Animal Alliance clinical team, led by Dr. Hernandez, gathers in the morning to plan their schedule for the day.*

*Checking on a dog. His rapport with his patients is evident.*

been given is not working and I can't get better. We resort to humane euthanasia when nothing else will work or when we don't have the capacity to provide what the animal needs. None of us get into the profession to euthanize animals, but we did get into the profession to ensure animal welfare is protected. Animals must have access to appropriate care, and when this cannot be provided, we must do what's needed to end suffering.

#### **WHEN GOING THE EXTRA MILE IS THE WAY TO GO**

Yes, it's true that I'm known for going to bat for animals. LSU called me about a paralyzed cat brought in by

a Good Samaritan. I told LSU I didn't know if we'd be able to support the extensive case at CAA but I said they could send him over. When we got him, he couldn't use his back legs, yet he was still super happy. I moved forward with taking X-rays, which showed he had been shot, and a pellet was lodged in his spinal cord. I thought he'd have to be euthanized. But he had a will to live. We named him Hermie. I took him to my house and cared for him for months. He ended up going to Idaho to a cat rescue that fitted him for mobility wheels. He made friends with an old dog that lived outside their cat room. He has a very good life at the sanctuary.



## LIVES IN OUR HANDS

The save rates in shelters have gotten better because vets are in the shelters. But most shelters in the U.S. do not have a veterinarian on staff. A contributing factor is the debt-to-income ratio for new graduates. If you become a shelter vet for a private nonprofit or a state-owned shelter, you are taking a pay cut. Another factor is that smaller shelters don't have certified euthanasia technicians, so the burden of having to euthanize animals falls on the veterinarian. It is stressful to be the decision-maker and the one performing the euthanasia.

At CAA, vets don't have to bear that burden alone. Even if euthanasia is the best decision for the animal, it is still going to weigh on me. Finding outlets, cooking and reading, have helped. If I've had a really bad day, I'll stop on the way home to pick up something to cook and sometimes I invite my staff over. Shelter medicine definitely takes a toll on everybody that's in it, and so we have to know when it is time to take a break.

## SOME ARE MADE FOR THIS JOB

I never go to a vet conference and hear people say, "Oh my gosh, I really want your job!" Everybody says, "I can't believe you do all of

## CAA'S PETS FOR LIFE PROGRAM HAS PROVIDED ABOUT

**1,700**  
SPAY AND NEUTER  
SURGERIES

**14,000**  
VETERINARY  
SERVICES, INCLUDING  
MEDICATIONS

**3,200**  
ANIMAL CARE  
SUPPLIES

TO

**2,756**  
PEOPLE FOR THEIR

**5,339**  
PETS

that." I really think that some people are made for it, and some people are not. I love my work because I never have to question if I'm making a difference. Whether I show up and I see our in-house animals or if I'm out in the community giving people's pets rabies shots, I'm always making an impact. At CAA, we provide a service to the public, and it's incredibly rewarding.

## ACCESS TO CARE, EXPANDING TO MEET NEEDS

We are so excited to see the expansion of CAA into a better developed Access to Care department. Care is getting more expensive, and CAA's Pets for Life, a program within our Access to Care Department, aims to keep pets and people together in underserved areas in East Baton Rouge Parish. Staff members use connections made in the community to identify families in need of vet care and then coordinate with my CAA medical team on scheduling services in the mobile clinic or at CAA. Once the animals are on the veterinary care schedule, I either directly provide or

oversee the care of all animals sent to us.

It can be intimidating going into communities that are in rougher parts of town, but providing these services has taught me that people welcome people trying to help their animals. The sense of community and gratitude is overwhelming. Early in 2025, while out in the community setting up our mobile clinic, a guy drove by and said, 'Miss Paula (CAA Director of Access to Care), you've been doing this for a long time. You got my dog neutered six years ago.' That's the presence you have to have to help turn the tide. Backyard breeding is a really rough thing that we have to figure out to address pet overpopulation. You're not even going to see the backyard unless you establish a relationship with the person first. You have to gain their trust to be effective.

## COMMUNICATION MATTERS

The ability to effectively communicate is important in my work. I grew up in rural North Louisiana which taught me how to have a conversation with anybody. When the CAA team goes out for wellness clinics, we meet people who don't know what they need for their animal. We don't judge them. We see what we can do for them and communicate the best we can to them to teach them

**RX FOR STRESS:  
FOOD, BOOKS,  
AND TRAVEL. HE  
AND HIS WIFE ARE  
BEACH PEOPLE  
AND RETURN  
TO WHERE THEY  
HONEYMOONED,  
HAWAII, EVERY  
OTHER YEAR.**

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about their animals. Every veterinarian is a teacher, and good communication is essential for effectiveness. I work really hard to try to open the lines of communication with LSU Vet Med. We talk and get on the same page, which helps us work together to help animals in our community. Also, our relationship with Baton Rouge Community College continues to grow, and we regularly receive interns and externs from their veterinary technology department. CAA is inviting others in so that we can grow to meet expanding needs. Being transparent and owning what we do is important. I'm happy to sit and talk to anyone about what we do and why. That's what we learn to do when we're in vet school at LSU. We learn to communicate with people and figure out how to integrate shared values into what we are doing.

**LIFELINES: HELPING THE  
MOST VULNERABLE**

We partner with Bissell Pet Foundation and its Fix

the Future Program to address the lack of access to veterinary care for both shelters and pet owners. Bissell pays contracted veterinarians directly who work with approved organizations where spay-neuter is most needed. We have used their vets at CAA to help us. Now we have fewer than 40 animals in the shelter that need surgery. Most of them are waiting on stray holds to expire for us to do their surgery.

I've also worked hard to create new programs. We recently got a grant to provide parvo treatment in-shelter using Elanco's Canine Parvo Monoclonal Antibody (CPMA), which is something we had never been able to do before. Parvo was pretty much a death sentence to any puppy that came

in. If they tested positive, they would immediately be euthanized, along with any member of the litter, to prevent spread. Parvo is just too dangerous of a virus to remain in the shelter. It would spread like wildfire if it remained within our walls. Through collaboration with our director team, we compromised. If an animal wasn't showing clinical signs, they had 24 hours to get placed out of the shelter. If they were showing clinical signs they had to be out by the end of the day, which gave them more time to be networked to foster care and outpatient care or for rescues to pull them and treat them. When CPMA became available, we wrote a grant to fund the drug and now, with our new treatment policy, parvovirus is not a death sentence. We are able to provide care, properly isolate, and network the animals into foster care or to rescues. Treatment decreases the course of the illness and increases the ability for rescues to treat. CAA has come so far to be able to do this instead of just having to euthanize puppies. We can give them a chance.

**DECISION-MAKING IN  
TREATMENT**

We have a good number of emergency and ICU cases and do our best to manage those. Why not try? We had



*Dr. Heather Stevens, on right, graduated from LSU Vet Med in 2011. She is a relief veterinarian and works throughout South Louisiana. Drs. Stevens and Hernandez met through Bissell Pet Foundation's "Fix the Future" Program. Dr. Stevens lends her talents to many shelters and nonprofits.*

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two puppies and found one that had passed away in the kennel. Both had terrible hookworms. One puppy was still alive but had bad anemia. We don't have a blood bank. So, I pulled one of our healthy shelter dogs, did a blood draw, and performed a blood transfusion on that puppy. I pulled out an emergency book, followed procedures, and placed a catheter in the puppy's jugular vein. He lived and our then-LSU intern, Dr. Isabel Grazian, adopted him. The blood donor, one of our



## ANIMAL WELFARE IN LOUISIANA

The full interview will be available as part of an oral history series, Animal Welfare in Louisiana, a joint project conducted by Sandra Sarr, communications manager at LSU Vet Med, and Jennifer Cramer, director of the Williams Center for Oral History, LSU Libraries Special Collections. It will be available to researchers and members of the public in 2026.

Visit the Center's website at  
[lib.lsu.edu/oralhistory](http://lib.lsu.edu/oralhistory)

long-stay dogs, got adopted, too, because he was a hero. He was one of our older pit bulls, and I picked him because I knew that if he and I saved this puppy, I could also maybe save him. I wanted to get him adopted badly. It worked.

### I ALWAYS TRY IF I CAN

We do not always have resources to treat involved cases, but when we do, why not try? In complex medical cases, there's a sense I can get when I feel animals don't have a will to live, when they've given up and their demeanor seems to say they feel they are at the end. It's a feeling I get when I walk into a room and I think, "This animal is ready and doesn't want to be here anymore." It's sad to see your patient fade

away, cases turn south no matter what you are doing. Sometimes, simply, nothing can be done. I do think I have an intuitive sense about what I need to do for animals, whether they're going to get better or not, and when it's time to not prolong suffering. But I always try if I can, and if I have to make the call, I know that I have done my best for my patients that otherwise would have had no one there to advocate or care for them.

### BECOMING A LEADER

When I first started, I was really nervous. I was only 24 when I graduated from vet school. I wasn't worried about being the doctor. I was worried about the management aspect because I had never managed people on this scale. I worked at a gas station

and was a shift lead, but it's different managing a team of clinicians and support staff. I'm the youngest one here. I still struggle with it occasionally even though I'm confident in my ability to handle the job. Working with the other full-time veterinarian, Dr. Payne, makes the job much easier. He has been practicing for a very long time and is a wealth of knowledge. We bounce ideas off each other and work incredibly well despite the age difference. Dr. Payne is great at some surgeries and I'm really good at others. I like to fix cherry eyes, which is when the third eyelid gland pops out and you put it back into place. It's kind of like mowing grass—you can see your progress immediately. Once you get the procedure going, suddenly, the gland just

pops back where it's supposed to go. I also really like to do amputations because the relief the animal feels is immediate.

When I started here, over 200 animals in the shelter needed surgeries. The shelter was structured to have three veterinarians on staff, but I was the only vet here for about two months. I was still doing all the student rotation teaching, sick animals, surgeries, foster and adoption concerns, and managing staff. I worked hard to get that number down with a relief vet and providing good structure. I streamlined a lot of our processes to make things faster and smoother for the team and be able to get animals out of the shelter quicker. I can see how far not only CAA has come, but how far I have come, too.



FEATURE

# *Victor's vision*

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Rare white alligator's vision  
restored in groundbreaking  
surgery at LSU Vet Med

BY SANDRA SARR



*Dr. Renee Carter and her Ophthalmology team prepare for Victor's surgery*

There's more to Victor, the white alligator, than meets the eye. His journey from struggling to see his food to having his vision restored in an unprecedented cataract surgery has made veterinary medicine history and improved the beloved alligator's life.

When caretakers at the Audubon Zoo noticed that Victor, a leucistic alligator with rare white skin and deep

blue eyes, could not see his dinner dangled before him, they realized something was wrong. It's the kind of problem that could cost an alligator in the wild his life. Dr. Robert MacLean, Audubon associate veterinarian, said his colleague and LSU Vet Med alumna, Dr. Hilary Householder, called in LSU Vet Med ophthalmologist Dr. Renee Carter to examine Victor's eyes.

Dr. Carter confirmed that Victor, age 12, had an advanced cataract in his

left eye with evidence of inflammation.

Leucistic alligators like Victor are rare creatures, with their pale ivory skin making them easy prey in the wild. Now, Victor is even more extraordinary—he is the first alligator known to undergo cataract surgery, a procedure that, according to Dr. Carter's research during preparation, had never been performed in the U.S.

In February, a well-coordinated plan was



*Drs. Renee Carter, Pilar Camacho-Luna, and Hannah Gafen first determined Victor was a candidate for surgery. After performing tests, they were confident they could improve his vision and moved forward with surgery.*

developed for a collaborative effort among LSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital services, including Zoological Medicine, Ophthalmology, and Anesthesia. Dr. Javier Nevarez led the Zoological Medicine team, Dr. Carter headed the Ophthalmology team, and Dr. Queiroz-Williams oversaw Anesthesiology. These services are among LSU Veterinary Medicine's 19 specialties that work together to provide exceptional medical care.

Following careful deliberations, Victor was transported by Audubon Zoo clinicians under sedation to LSU Vet Med, where Drs. Nevarez, Queiroz-Williams, and Householder faced the challenge of safely transferring him from his carrier cage for anesthesia. Drs. Queiroz-Williams and Nevarez managed Victor while he remained sedated until he was fully anesthetized, allowing Dr. Carter and her team



## VICTOR'S ORIGINS

According to Dr. Robert MacLean at Audubon, Victor's original hatch location is unknown. He came to Audubon Zoo in June 2019 from Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries. They'd had him for about six years when they gave him to Audubon Zoo. "Wildlife and Fisheries contacted us to see if we would take him because of our expertise in leucistic alligator care. We were told he came from a wild nest but have no details where it was located. Historically, all of the white gators that have been found in Louisiana were found in the south Houma area, so it is very likely that is the same for this one," Dr. MacLean said.



**THE TEAM  
NEEDED TO  
DETERMINE  
VICTOR WAS  
A GOOD  
CANDIDATE FOR  
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THEY MOVED  
FORWARD WITH  
CONFIDENCE  
THAT THEY  
COULD IMPROVE  
HIS VISION.**



to perform the complex procedure on an alligator's uniquely structured eye.

"Their eyes are on the top part of their skulls, so when they are submerged in water, they can still see above the surface. This made it tricky to position him for surgery," Dr. Carter explained.

The team first needed to determine if Victor was a good candidate for surgery. After performing several tests, including an ocular ultrasound and an electroretinogram (ERG), they found that his retina was functional and attached. Confident that they could improve his vision, they moved forward with the procedure.

Dr. Hannah Gafen, who led the surgery, said, "While cataract surgery is typically straightforward in dogs, Victor's case required us to

*Victor's  
compassionate  
team holds his  
hand.*

adapt to the differences in his anatomy and response to medications. There were significant challenges we had to overcome."

The surgery involved removing the cataract through phacoemulsification, a process where the lens is emulsified and removed.

Dr. Queiroz-Williams, along with Dr. Nevarez, ensured Victor's 8-foot-long body remained stable by staying in the correct depth of anesthesia and pain-free throughout the operation, which took nearly two hours.

"All went very smoothly. I was so grateful for the collaborative efforts of the Audubon Zoo, LSU

Zoological Medicine, and Anesthesiology, our awesome O.R. team, and, of course, the LSU Ophthalmology team," Dr. Gafen said.

Victor's clinical team not only performed the surgery but also placed a temporary fluid port to administer post-op eye drops. After a two-week recovery at the zoo's animal hospital, Victor triumphantly returned to his enclosure, just in time for Mardi Gras, with his vision restored.

The LSU clinical team plans to publish their findings in the pioneering case.

"We are happy this surgery improves Victor's quality of life, helping him interact and experience his world in a more complete way," Dr. Gafen said.

Back in his habitat, Victor is once again snapping up his dinner, returning to his normal behaviors.

"We wanted Victor to go back to being Victor—that makes us the happiest," Dr. Carter said.

## CURIOUS?

Ask us your questions, and we will do our best to answer them!

Stay tuned for video where clinicians explain how they prepared for this groundbreaking procedure that has restored Victor's vision.



*Dr. Sheri Speede pictured with one of the three founding chimps, Becky, at the hotel in Cameroon where they were held for entertainment purposes.*

## Making good on a promise: Dr. Sheri Speede saves orphaned chimps in Africa

BY NATALIE KAISER

**NEARLY 30 YEARS AGO**, the course of Dr. Sheri Speede's life changed forever when she encountered three adult chimpanzees—Jacky, Pepe, and Becky—caged as tourist attractions at a hotel in Cameroon, Africa. Working as a volunteer veterinarian for a local wildlife center, Dr. Speede was haunted by the image of the three chimps, who had languished in their tiny cages for decades.

Like countless others, these chimps were captured as infants when poachers

killed their mothers for the illegal ape meat (bushmeat) trade, a rampant market in Central Africa. Not big enough to be used for meat, the babies were sold as pets and eventually wound up at the hotel. Looking into their defeated eyes, Speede promised them she would be back for them.

In August 1999, she made good on her promise. To save Jacky, Pepe, and Becky, she knew she needed to take matters into her own hands. Those three chimps became the first residents of Dr.

Speede's freshly founded sanctuary, Sanaga-Yong Chimpanzee Rescue, now in its 26th year.

Today, Sanaga-Yong spans 225 acres in Cameroon's Mbargue Forest and provides sanctuary to 78 orphaned chimps who'd fallen victim to the illegal bushmeat and live animal trades. The chimps live in tracts of natural habitat forest surrounded by electric fencing, with individual enclosures ranging from 1.3 to 20 acres.

Before deciding to split her time between Africa and the U.S., Dr. Speede spent 13 years living full-time in Cameroon, which did not come without challenges. When she first arrived in Cameroon, she spoke no French, the predominant language of the country. She eventually learned enough to converse. In addition to the early language barrier, Dr. Speede had to get used to the stark differences between living in Oregon and in rural Cameroon.

"Living in a forest camp without the amenities that I'd considered basic can take some getting used to, but the forest is where the chimpanzees belong," Dr. Speede said. "And I've come to feel a real connection to the land."

After adapting to life in Cameroon, Dr. Speede's routine in Africa became a deeply ingrained part of her life. A typical day at Sanaga-Yong begins at 7 a.m. with Dr. Speede, the local workforce, and international volunteers spending their day caring for the chimps. "The chimps eat four times a day, and so much of the day is devoted to preparing food," Dr. Speede said. While caregivers, vets, and volunteers stay busy providing chimp care, other team members focus on initiatives in the surrounding community, such as conducting patrols to help combat illegal logging, poaching, and the trafficking of chimpanzees.

In 2024, Dr. Speede was informed about a poacher trying to sell a baby chimp in the nearest town, so she sent a team to investigate. The poacher realized he was exposed and got away, but a boy in the village led the team to the poacher's hunting camp deep in the forest. There, they found a baby chimp, now named Asha, lying in a pile of ash from a recent fire, abandoned to die.

Barely alive and riddled with shot-gun pellets, Asha was rushed to Sanaga-Yong, where vets provided intensive care. Although one of her fingers had to be amputated, Asha recovered. She now thrives at Sanaga-Yong with three older rescued juveniles who adore her. The four will be introduced



*Endangered in every country where they exist, chimpanzees have already gone extinct in four countries.*

## THIRTY YEARS CONFINED TO A TINY CAGE AT THE HOTEL, JACKY IS NOW AROUND 60, AND THE LAST SURVIVING MEMBER OF THE ORIGINAL RESIDENTS.

together to a group of adult chimps later this year.

The illegal bushmeat and live animal trades, along with relentless deforestation from logging and agriculture, are driving chimpanzees rapidly toward extinction. Cameroon is one of the three most important habitat countries for the Central African chimpanzee subspecies, and it's also home to most of the few thousand remaining members of the most endangered Cameroon-Nigeria subspecies. "All chimpanzees are listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as endangered in every country where they still exist," Dr. Speede said. "They've already gone extinct in four."

Despite the importance of Sanaga-Yong's work for chimpanzees, Dr. Speede

said that one of the most challenging aspects of running the sanctuary is gaining support in the U.S. Funding comes primarily from the donations of private individuals and at fundraising events in New York City and Portland, Ore.

"Fundraising for a species that few people have a personal connection with is hard," she said. "Unlike dogs and cats, not many people have known a chimpanzee."

Even when aspects of the work get tough, Dr. Speede stays driven by her personal connection to the chimpanzees. Having worked with them for decades, she has developed an understanding of chimps as a species.

"Chimpanzees and humans are very much alike in emotional capacity and



spectrum of behaviors," she said. "It's easy to identify and empathize with them."

Jacky, the first chimp she met at that hotel, is just one Dr. Speede has personally connected with over the years. After spending nearly 30 years confined to a tiny cage at the hotel, Jacky is now around 60 years old and the last surviving member of the original three residents of Sanaga-Yong. Dr. Speede said that Jacky owns her heart and has come a long way from his days at the hotel.

"While I wish they were all still living free in the forest where they belong, it has been the privilege of my life to know and work with chimpanzees," Dr. Speede said. "Seeing them, after they've lost and suffered so much, form loving relationships with each other and find joy within adoptive social groups is profoundly rewarding."

To learn more about the

*Jacky was a part of the group of chimps held at a hotel, inspiring Dr. Sheri Speede to create the Sanaga-Yong Chimpanzee Rescue. Previously known as the "mad" chimpanzee around town because of his aggressive and erratic behavior at the hotel, Jacky flourished at Sanaga-Yong and now, in his old age, takes each day easy. "He owns my heart," Dr. Speede said.*

Sanaga-Yong Chimpanzee Rescue, visit [sychimprescue.org](http://sychimprescue.org). "Sanaga-Yong has developed a following of very generous, loyal, amazing supporters, including some of my dear LSU Vet Med classmates, who have kept us going," Dr. Speede said. "We are extremely grateful." Sanaga-Yong welcomes international volunteers as well as veterinarians to work in six-month increments.



To learn more about volunteering, contact Rebecca Pool at [rebecca@sanaga-yong.org](mailto:rebecca@sanaga-yong.org).



## When healer becomes patient: Veterinary oncologist, Erin Roof-Wages, forges deeper connections with patients and their people while navigating cancer

**WITH MORE THAN A** decade of guiding pet owners through the challenges of cancer, veterinary medical oncologist Dr. Erin Roof-Wages was no stranger to delivering difficult news. But nothing in her veterinary medicine background prepared her for being on the receiving end when her own oncologist said the words, “You have cancer.”

That was in February 2023, the same month Dr. Roof-Wages became pregnant only to experience a miscarriage soon after. Despite her devastating loss, she still felt pregnant, leading her to seek medical answers. Tests revealed abnormally high levels of human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG), a pregnancy hormone, despite her miscarriage. After undergoing a DNC, a CT scan, and various other tests, the doctors diagnosed her with gestational choriocarcinoma, a rare, aggressive cancer that develops from placental tissue after pregnancy.

Dr. Roof-Wages’ background in veterinary oncology helped her remain calm. “Of course, I was scared, but I think I reacted better than my husband,” said Dr. Roof-Wages, who is on the medical oncology team at the Animal Cancer Care Clinic in Orlando, Fla.

After she underwent surgery, the doctors observed her hCG levels continuing to rise, signaling the need for chemotherapy. But Dr. Roof-Wages was not a typical patient. She knew what to expect.

“Instead of the doctors explaining to me what chemotherapy is and how it might affect my body, they were able to give me the full, medical run-down,” she said. She started chemotherapy



*Left: Erin Roof-Wages and her horse “Jack.” Photo by Shannon Brinkman.*

*Right: Erin Roof-Wages, Aaron Wages and daughter, Tabitha, at an LSU football game.*

and continued with her daily life—riding horses and working in her clinic.

Having cancer would prove to change many aspects of her life, particularly her relationship with veterinary oncology. Her personal experience with cancer allowed Dr. Roof-Wages to connect with clients and patients in a way few veterinary oncologists ever can.

“Everyone’s reaction to the disease is different, and I feel that’s true of animals, as well,” she said.

While undergoing chemotherapy and losing her hair, she forged deeper connections with clients facing similar struggles. “Around 90 percent of clients didn’t even know I had cancer during my treatment,” she said. “It really taught me that we need to give each other grace because we really have no idea what is going on in each other’s lives.”

Since early 2024, Dr. Roof-Wages has been in remission. In September 2024, she and her horse, Cooley One

Too Many, competed in a horse jumping competition in Lexington, Ky., and ranked among the top three winners. She continues practicing veterinary oncology and remains in touch with her oncologist, sustaining the colleague-like relationship formed during her treatment.

After earning her DVM in 2008, Dr. Roof-Wages moved to Florida, where she completed an internship at Veterinary Specialists of South Florida. Following a residency and board certification, she began her career as a veterinary oncologist, which would later play a crucial role in her own cancer experience.

She and her husband, Dr. Aaron Wages, have been together ever since their second year at LSU Vet Med. “After we graduated, he followed me to Florida for my internship and has been following me around ever since,” Dr. Roof-Wages said. Dr. Aaron Wages is a veterinarian at Helping Hands, where his primary interests are soft tissue surgery and dentistry. Together, they have a daughter and live in the Orlando area.

“The whole experience really taught me to take it day-by-day,” she said. “One day might be a good day and the next one, a bad day. No matter what, I know I’ll get through it.”

## Trailblazer: Dr. Kimberly Boykin researches sustainable food sources for the future



**JUST WEEKS AFTER EARNING** her PhD from LSU Vet Med in May 2024, Dr. Kimberly Boykin welcomed her second child—and stepped into a new role as assistant professor of zoological medicine at LSU Vet Med’s Wildlife Hospital of Louisiana. Her work focuses on conservation medicine and leading-edge research into biosecurity and the sustainability of non-traditional food sources, like edible insects.

“Dr. Kim Boykin’s work is about the importance of seizing opportunities and being open to changing direction,” said her mentor, Dr. Mark Mitchell, professor of zoological medicine.

Dr. Boykin’s path has certainly done that. Originally from Winston-Salem, N.C., she earned her DVM at North Carolina State University in 2016 before completing a small animal internship at LSU Vet Med. While she initially planned to specialize in zoological medicine through a residency, she discovered a passion for research that sent

her in a whole new direction.

“I never expected to get into research,” Dr. Boykin said.

She received both her master’s and PhD at LSU Vet Med with research aimed at investigating the epidemiology of viral and bacterial diseases of crickets grown for human and animal food consumption. Her passions feed into each other, enhancing her abilities that much more.

While completing her master’s in 2019, she was contacted by Fluker’s Cricket Farms in Port Allen, La, about a virus affecting their crickets. Her investigation revealed that the virus was not just a local issue—it was widespread across farms.

“These viruses are pretty much endemic at every farm,” she said.

The experience sparked a deeper interest in insect health, leading Dr. Boykin to pursue a PhD focused on the epidemiology of viral and bacterial diseases in feeder crickets—an increasingly important protein source for both animals and humans.

Her goal? To make insect farming more efficient, sustainable, and safe, especially in the face of

global food insecurity and climate change. With the world’s population expected to reach 10 billion by 2050, her work addresses a pressing question: How do we feed more people with fewer resources?

“We need to rethink how we produce food to feed more people,” she said. “And insects can play a big role.”

Insect consumption—also known as entomophagy—isn’t new. Humans have eaten insects for thousands of years, and in many parts of the world, it’s still a common practice. What’s new is the growing interest in more parts of the world using insects, like crickets and black soldier flies, as sustainable protein sources for pet food, animal feed, and human consumption.

“Kim is on the leading edge of conservation medicine,” said Dr. Mitchell. “Her work is creating a direct link between veterinarians and sustainable food systems, especially in areas where people and wildlife frequently interact.”

That link is rooted in the “One Health” philosophy, which recognizes that human, animal, and environmental health are all connected. Dr. Boykin

*Drs. Mark Mitchell and Kimberly Boykin continue to collaborate. “Kim is on the leading edge of conservation medicine,” he said.*

applies this mindset to her research every day, focusing on improving biosecurity in insect farming and increasing production yields.

“There’s still a stigma around eating crickets,” she said. “But the more we understand them—and the safer and more efficient their production becomes—the more viable they are as a food source.”

Her research aims to help further pave the way. Black soldier fly larvae are now used in some pet foods as a protein alternative, especially for animals with allergies to traditional ingredients like chicken or beef. Feeder crickets may be next.

“There’s work being done right now on using crickets in dog and cat food,” said Dr. Boykin, whose work is a testament to the power of curiosity, resilience, and forging a path less traveled.



*Drs. Matt and Nancy Welborn pictured at a dance together in the '80s. They have been married for over 30 years.*

## Dr. Matt Welborn is named Distinguished Alumnus of the Year

**DR. MATT WELBORN, ALUMNUS** of the LSU School of Veterinary Medicine (LSU Vet Med) and professor of food animal health maintenance, has been honored as the Distinguished Alumnus of the Year. He has been instrumental in transforming the LSU Vet Med Food Animal Division, making it one of the most sought-after student rotations. Through his work on multiple committees, maintaining the largest teaching load at LSU Vet Med, providing ongoing community outreach, and advising numerous students, Welborn has firmly established himself as a distinguished member of the LSU Vet Med community.

Dr. Welborn graduated with his DVM from LSU Vet Med in 1987. From there, he went into private practice for one year but, quickly realizing he wanted more, he returned to LSU in 1990 to complete a food animal and production medicine residency. He was swiftly recruited by University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine (UTCVM), where he spent over two decades in various roles including field services section leader, associate director of public health initiatives, and associate professor.

At UTCVM, he also mentored multiple students, one being Dr. Clare Scully, associate professor of food animal health maintenance at LSU Vet Med. As a mentee of Dr. Welborn, Dr. Scully said she witnessed firsthand his extraordinary commitment to both his university community and the public.

Dr. Welborn also earned his master's in public health from the University of Tennessee in 2005, and in the following year, he became a diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Preventative Medicine. Dr. Welborn remains the only LSU Vet Med faculty member with both a DVM and MPH.

His public health expertise has taken him abroad, including an invitation to Jordan to teach a course on prevention and detection of zoonotic diseases. As a certified Department of Homeland Security responder, Dr. Welborn aided in disaster response efforts during the 2016 flood as well as Hurricane Harvey in Houston.

In May 2012, Dr. Welborn was hired at LSU Vet Med as a professor of food animal health maintenance. At the time, the Food Animal Division was limited, with Dr. Welborn as the sole faculty member overseeing two clinical services. Despite this, he remained determined

*The Welborn family pictured at the Distinguished Alumnus of the Year event.*

and, over time, he increased the caseload, completely revitalizing the Food Animal Division at LSU Vet Med.

Every year since his return to LSU, Dr. Welborn has been awarded the Dean's Teacher Merit Roll, and in 2020, he received this honor from all four classes. He is the advisor for a multitude of clubs and assists with the Student Palpation Team. Dr. Scully, former mentee and now colleague of Dr. Welborn, praised his impact on the community, saying, "He is kind, practical, and we all know our toxic plants a little better because of him."

Dr. Welborn's personal and professional life are intertwined with LSU Vet Med. He met his wife, Dr. Nancy Welborn, LSU Vet Med's associate professor of Community Practice, when he was a freshman at LSU and she was in high school, through an introduction by Nancy's sister. Both Nancy and Matt Welborn shared the dream of becoming veterinarians, and after dating for seven years, they got married. Their union came immediately after Matt graduated from LSU Vet Med and just after Nancy finished her first year at LSU Vet Med. Today, they work alongside each other at LSU Vet Med, where their journey began 45 years ago.

"Through his unwavering commitment to animal health, veterinary education, and public health, Dr. Matt Welborn has left an indelible mark on LSU Vet Med. This award celebrates his lifelong dedication to service, innovation, and care," Dean Oliver Garden said.

## Reunion photo album



*Class of 1984*



*Class of 1989*



*Class of 1994*



*Class of 1999*



*Class of 2004*



*Class of 2009*



*Class of 2014*



*Class of 2019*



*Pictured from left to right: Alfred and Susan Stevens, Janet and Robert Prescott (Pensacola, Fla.), John and Mary Lou Lawrence (St. Joseph, Mo.)*

## 1977

**John Lawrence, Robert Prescott, and Alfred Stevens** recently reunited for the first time in decades after graduating from LSU Vet Med in May 1977. As members of the third graduating class, they were part of a tight-knit group of 48 students who spent over three years in temporary facilities while the new veterinary school building was under construction. Their time together forged strong bonds that remain even after all these years. Members of the group say they enjoyed a nostalgic tour of the now state-of-the-art veterinary school and were amazed at how far technology had come since

their student days. "The most advanced piece of surgical technology we had at our disposal was the esophageal stethoscope," Stevens said. The reunion was filled with laughter, plenty of storytelling, and a generous helping of southern cuisine, from gumbo and boudin to beignets.



*1990 LSU Vet Med alumni celebrate New Year's Eve with a hike at Big Bend. Pictured from left to right: Joe Navarre, Christine Navarre, Amber Crossland, and Lamar Crossland. Christine, Amber, and Lamar are all members of the Class of 1990. Joe is a Class of 1985 graduate of LSU Animal Science*

## 1987

**Matt Welborn**, professor of food animal health maintenance, has been selected as the LSU Vet Med 2024 Distinguished Alumnus of the Year.

**Nancy Barte Best** reports that LSU Vet Med was strongly represented at the Arkansas VMA winter meeting, including attendees from the LSU Vet Med Classes of 1987, 1988, and 1989.

## 1988

**Sarah Shedenhelm** and several other LSU Vet Med alumni were inducted into the Arkansas Veterinary Medical Association (VMA) Board of Directors in February.

## 1990

Members of the LSU Vet Med **Class of 1990** got together to celebrate New Year's Eve with a hike in Big Bend National Park.



*Jeff Nulph, Nancy Barte Best, and Bill Melton enjoy dinner together.*

**Karen Sherman** has sold her clinic that she started in 1992 to Dr. Keturah Ollie-Hayes, a Mississippi State graduate of 2022. She is now retired and keeping busy in other ventures she has been involved with for several years.

## 1991

**Andy Plauche '91** and **Kirstin Plauche '92** taught a two-week elective course to third and fourth-year students on advanced business management in the spring. The elective taught many essential skills, such as being a great associate and boss, and introduced principles of business ownership and management. The elective course focused on alleviating fears associated with upper management and small business management in veterinary students, skills that are not taught at vet school. They concluded their two weeks together with a crawfish boil.

## 1992

**Joe Dalgo** practices veterinary medicine in Marrero, La., and practices magic as a professional

magician. He performs a weekly show at Vampire Apothecary, a New Orleans French Quarter restaurant. His shows are centered around the culture and history of New Orleans. His magic shows have been covered in a national magicians magazine, M.U.M, as well as a local New Orleans news network, Fox 8. Along with his weekly shows, Dalgo has also performed at the Golden Nugget Casino in Las Vegas. (Watch for a feature story with photos about Joe in an upcoming issue!)



*Above: Kirstin and Andy Plauche are pictured with their advanced business management course students.*



*Left: Students of Kirstin and Andy Plauche's advanced business management elective course enjoy a crawfish boil after completing the course.*

## 2001



**Ashley Stokes**, former dean of the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture's UT Extension, has been appointed dean of the University of California, Davis College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. Stokes earned a BS in physiological psychology from the University of Alabama, her DVM and PhD in veterinary physiology, pharmacology and toxicology from LSU Vet Med, and her MBA from Colorado State University. Stokes brings over 30 years of higher education experience, including leadership roles at Colorado State University and the University of Hawaii at Mānoa. "It is an honor to have the opportunity to bring my experience, energy, and endurance to UC Davis to lead this high-performing, outstanding college," she said. "I'm excited for this next step!"

## 2009

**Michael Rossi** won Southeastern University's Distinguished Alumnus of 2024 award for his



*Courtney Beary, '18, showcases her new application, Grizz, at the LVMA Winter Meeting.*

advancements and research in veterinary dermatology. He is currently the chair of the Communication Committee for the World Association for Veterinary Dermatology. In 2015, he founded Coastal Veterinary Dermatology and Ear Clinic located in the Houston area, and has been working there ever since. Dr. Rossi is a board-certified veterinary dermatologist and a member of the American College of Veterinary Dermatology, an organization that ensures that its members maintain the highest level of post-graduate training in veterinary dermatology and allergy. He also holds a master's degree in pulmonary disease in horses. He has expertise in the diagnosis and treatment

of all skin, coat, ear, and nail diseases in animals, including bacterial, viral, fungal, and parasitic infections, allergies, immune-mediated skin diseases, endocrine (hormonal) disorders, inherited skin diseases, and certain skin cancers.

## 2018

**Courtney Beary** launched her new business, Grizz, at the Louisiana Veterinary Medical Association Winter Meeting 2025. Grizz is a web and mobile application that connects relief vets with clinics in Louisiana. "We care deeply about our community, including the great selection of veterinarians that are crucial in the care of our animals every day. I believe Grizz is the solution to help doctors both at clinics and traveling create the balanced life they desire." Learn more about Grizz at [www.grizzvet.com](http://www.grizzvet.com)

## In Memoriam



**Dr. Christopher Barlow** passed away on March 9, 2025. He was 49 years old.

Before discovering his passion for veterinary medicine, Christopher worked as a radiology technologist. He received his bachelor of science degree from Northwestern State University and a master of science in radiologic science from Midwestern State University in Texas.

Realizing he wanted to pursue veterinary medicine, he attended LSU Vet Med and graduated in 2020. After graduating with his DVM, he went on to work at University Veterinary Hospital in Shreveport, La.

He was a dedicated veterinarian who demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the well-being of animals and the people who cared for them. Christopher will be remembered for his love, care, compassion, and comedic timing.



**Dr. Thomas Gall** passed away on April 2, 2025. He was 55.

Thomas' great love of animals led him to the field of veterinary medicine. He received his DVM from LSU Vet Med in 1995. He owned his own practice, Eastside Animal Hospital, in Blytheville, Ark., and was a well-known veterinarian in his community, beloved by his many clients there. Thomas also served his community as a member of the Blytheville Rotary Club.

Thomas' family was most important to him. He enjoyed spending time with his family and taking trips to the beach. He is survived by his son, Thomas Gene Gall. Thomas will be remembered for his compassion, his dedication to animal care, and the lasting impact he made on both his community and the veterinary profession.



### SHARE YOUR NEWS WITH US!

**UPROAR readers love hearing from each other!** Send us your news and photos, including marriages, births, and other milestones for publication in our Fall 2025 issue: [sarr1@lsu.edu](mailto:sarr1@lsu.edu)

*Dr. Ahmed Abdelmoneim, assistant professor 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.*

*Melanie Wilson, a PhD student in Dr. Abdelmoneim's lab, is investigating the effects of early-life lead exposure on neuronal development and the resulting stress-related behavioral changes.*



*Sadia Islam Sinza, DVM and PhD fellow in neuroscience, discusses her project co-authored with Dr. Olalekan Michael Ogundele, LSU Vet Med associate professor, at Phi Zeta Research Emphasis Day. Their research looks at how the normal brain works in decision-making based on rewards. The work can lead to a better understanding of potential therapeutic neural targets for developing or repurposing drugs that address neurological disorders such as autism, schizophrenia, depression, and addiction.*

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