



Dedicated Mentor

Dr. Randall Pedersen leads local scholarship program

Encourages young Nebraskans to study at K-State CVM

Story by Joe Montgomery

In a state known for “Cornhuskers” and “Big Red,” there’s at least one profession that leans decidedly purple: veterinary medicine. Traditionally, K-State’s College of Veterinary Medicine has educated a significant number of Nebraska natives to become veterinarians, many who return to their home state to practice. A native of Boelus, Neb., Dr. Randall Pedersen works hard to make sure that tradition continues.

“As an alumnus, this is your home,” said Dr. Pedersen, who graduated with his DVM in 1965. “This is where they’ve (K-State) given everything to me to get me where I am today.”

Where he is today is partially retired and living with his wife, Nancy, in Royal, Neb., serving as a herd-health consultant for a large number of clients he’s built up over the years. He’s cut back his caseload, but says he has no immediate plans to fully retire.

“As long as your health is good, you enjoy what you’re doing and you can still deliver a good service, why not do it?” Dr. Pedersen said. “Once you quit — as fast as technology is going — you’re out of the loop.”

Selecting students for scholarships

While his workload is less these days, what hasn’t decreased is Dr. Pedersen’s passion for K-State. He’s been an active part of the Olson Brothers Foundation that provides scholarships to Nebraska students who want to study food animal medicine at the K-State College of Veterinary Medicine. He has worked closely with the applicants, some of whom he has mentored.

“We’re getting top quality students from Nebraska coming to our program,” Dr. Pedersen said. “The mentoring process works both ways. I mentor them, but they also mentor me. Some of the students have called me if they have a problem, and sometimes if I get into something where I need help, I’ll call them. It might be about symptoms, diagnosis or treatment.”

The Olson Brothers Foundation provides around \$50,000 in scholarship support annually. Typically eight to 10 students receive the scholarship. Dr. Pedersen said this was what the Olson brothers wanted. This is a program he feels other Nebraskans would appreciate and could consider supporting or emulating.

Of his personal motivations, he said, “It behooves us to fulfill the wishes of the Olson Brothers. I want to make sure this is how it goes.”

Vernon and Evert Olson were longtime dairy farmers who lived near Loup City, Neb. Dr. Pedersen was their herd veterinarian and worked with them for many years.

“They were extremely good dairymen and enjoyed good cattle,” Dr. Pedersen said. “They wanted to promote the care of dairy animals. We became very good friends.”

When asked about his role in the creation of the scholarship, Dr. Pedersen shifts the idea of any credit away from himself.

“I really didn’t have that much input into it — it was all their idea,” he explained. “Their idea was to give some young person a chance to fulfill his or her life dream through this endowment. And certainly they’ve done it.”

When asked why he’s so inspired to steer Nebraska kids to K-State, Dr. Pedersen cited the quality of the program and the people.

“I feel strongly that a veterinary program is a four-year integrated program with a teaching hospital,” he said. “The teaching hospital is the center. You wouldn’t go to a medical school without a medical clinic or teaching hospital. That’s just not the way to do it.”

Emphasizing the value of mentoring

Dr. Pedersen pointed out another trait that he appreciates at K-State.

“The other thing that really impresses me about K-State is their mentoring program, not only from the perspective of faculty mentoring, but also student mentoring,” Dr. Pedersen said. “This is more important than even the faculty mentoring, because students can relate to each other.”

Dr. Pedersen said the concept of mentoring has always been important to him during his career.

“When I was starting out, Dr. Elmer Woelffer (from Wisconsin) was a prominent reproductive veterinarian in the United States,” Dr. Pedersen recalled. “When he’d come into my area, I would meet him and go through herds. When we started working together, he was 71 years old. We checked herds on a rotating basis for almost 20 years. He was one of the grandfathers of the theriogenology group. He was my real mentor.”

Dr. Pedersen also mentioned Dr. Lee Allenstein, Dr. John Noordsy and Dr. Jim Lewis.

“If it hadn’t had been for my mentors, Dr. Woelffer, Dr. Allenstein, Dr. Lewis, and Dr. Noordsy, they enhanced my expertise and I could have never achieved what I have achieved,” he said. “I feel very strongly about mentoring, and I have seen how these people have helped me. I would like to be able to help others to achieve a degree of proficiency they might not have otherwise been able to do.”

In addition to being influenced by mentors, Dr. Pedersen said he has heard a few sayings over the years he has tried to live by. The most recent one came while taking physical therapy following shoulder surgery.

“As my ancestors planted for me before I was born, so do I plant for those who come after me,” Dr. Pedersen said. “Veterinary medicine has allowed me to develop where I’d never had an opportunity before — they taught me what I know and I’ll always be indebted to them for this. What I can do to repay is a small token for what they’ve done for me.” 🐾



Nancy and Dr. Randall Pedersen display a wood-carved Asclepius outside their office at Royal, Neb. The Asclepius was carved by neighbor and local artist, Randy Erb.