

HISTORY

The following is an account of the early history of the Southeastern Michigan Veterinary Medical Association. It was compiled by Drs. Stephen Elko, F. D. Egan, Mary Beth Leininger, Mrs. Susan Armstrong, and Ms. Patti Wachtel.

Our Association organized in 1917; thus, we are in the 78th year of our existence as a professional society. The office of the national veterinary association was in Detroit and the Executive Secretary of the A.V.M.A., Dr. H. Preston Hoskins, served as secretary of our Association as well. When AVMA moved to Chicago in 1928, we lost the services of this capable and generous man.

Dr. John Schlingman of Parke-Davis succeeded Dr. Hoskins as secretary, serving two years. Dr. F. D. Egan was elected secretary-treasurer and program chairman in 1930 and held that office until 1947.

The organization plan of SEMVMA included Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties and each county was to be represented on the executive committee whenever practical. Membership dues were \$1.00 annually. Yearly income ranged from \$20.00 to \$35.00 per year. Dues were raised to \$2.00 in about 1941. In spite of our meager income, a war bond was purchased that yielded \$75.00 at maturity.

In the depths of the Depression, the membership dwindled to about a dozen members, including two from Parke-Davis and two federal meat inspectors. There was only one practitioner in Detroit who restricted practice to small animals; the remainder were general practitioners and they welcomed equine patients.

The first rabies vaccination program was begun in 1924. The Detroit Health Department asked the Association for a list of approved veterinarians who would act as representatives of the Department and sign rabies certificates. Apparently all veterinarians were not included on the list and a dispute ensued which had a lasting influence and effect on our Association. The fee for a rabies vaccination was \$3.00.

The mistake with the Health Department "approved" list started a price cutting campaign by the men who were left off. In one case, it is reported that a practitioner advertised rabies vaccinations for 50 cents, dogs bathed for \$1.00 and spaying for as low as \$3.00. The Depression and general shortage of cash (the City of Detroit was printing its own money known as script) prompted the Health Department to consider vaccinating dogs for free. A compromise was reached between SEMVMA and the Department of Health: veterinarians were to administer rabies vaccine for \$1.00, a fee which stood for ten years.

All veterinary fees dropped to disgraceful lows, during the Depression, due to poor cooperation and unethical attitudes. By hard work and diligent campaigning, the Association eventually got nearly all area practitioners to agree on minimum fees which were posted publicly in their offices. This effort by SEMVMA members changed the picture from vicious competition and mistrust of colleagues to mutual respect and good will.

This period is often thought of as the "good old days," but there was very little good about them, except for demonstrating the need for a strong local veterinary association. The SEMVMA saved some practitioners from bankruptcy and certainly no one person could have made the positive changes that required such cooperative effort to accomplish.

Advertising in the Yellow Pages was another problem until 1948. While advertising is touted as a good business practice, it took a massive educational campaign by SEMVMA to point out that if every member purchased a whole page of phone book advertising, the net result would be not one more animal to be treated, and the persistent advertiser would be suspected of needing advertising to boost his inferiority complex or substandard practice methods. Special meetings were called to discuss the problem, and personal visits to the veterinarians who initially failed to cooperate seemed to turn the tide. Yellow Pages advertising was confined to simple line listings, and under only one heading.

Throughout the years, the Association grew in membership and in stature. Meetings were held in members' hospitals, in restaurants, in clubs, hotels and halls, Herman Kiefer Hospital Auditorium, the Croatian Center, the Harlan House Motel and the Northland Inn. Most recently, all continuing education seminars, general meetings and council meetings have been held at the Mercy College Conference Center in Detroit (because of its central, convenient location).

During our history, we have hosted several A.V.M.A. conventions in Detroit — 1929, 1949, and 1971. We developed an excellent public relations program called Vetoscope and presented it at Cobo Hall as part of the first Freedom Festival in 1963. We sponsored the Health Care Symposia to assist breeders and the general public with the care of their pets.

Our continuing education programs for members have been recognized across the nation as outstanding. They are a credit to our Association and the C/E Committees members who have worked so hard to develop them.

HISTORY (cont)

In 1970, discussions began concerning the purchase of a permanent building for the Association and the employment of an executive secretary to handle the growing needs of the veterinary profession in southeastern Michigan. Although, plans to construct a building were abandoned, the Association hired its first administrative secretary in 1972. Mrs. Susan Armstrong housed the Association office in her home.

The Association recognized a need for specific group identity. The traditional emblem was replaced in 1981 with a puppy paw print. An official oath of membership, which stresses the professional philosophies of personal ethics and continuing education was adopted in 1971.

In 1976, our Association was one of the first state or local VMA's to undertake an extensive public relations program employing the services of a public relations firm. As a result of very diligent work on the part of P.R. Chairperson, Dr. Mary Beth Leininger, and the members of the Council, a monthly viewer phone-in television program "All About Animals" was telecast for two years on WTVS-Channel 56 in Detroit. Of the station's five phone-in shows, "All About Animals" generated the greatest viewer response: 200 - 300 calls were answered during every half hour program. Because of the show's popularity, it was expanded to include a 3-5 minute film about pet health and animal disease problems. The only reason "All About Animals" left the air was because of a change in station management that deleted the phone-in format entirely.

A weekly question-answer column in the Observer-Ec-centric newspapers was published for over three years. The major metropolitan Detroit daily newspapers ran numerous stories about our members, pet health care and various Association activities (such as SEMVMA's sponsorship of the first snow leopard cub to be born at the Detroit Zoo). Our PR firm placed members on radio and television talk shows, as well as on newscasts to discuss animal related news items.

From 1980 to 1986, the Association utilized our PR counsel to publicize individual pet health issues such as heartworm disease, the outbreak of canine parvovirus, the introduction of a vaccine to protect against feline leukemia virus and the serious problem of flea infestation.

In 1986, the PR Committee changed its emphasis from public information to marketing. The Association sponsored the first midwestern presentation of the California VMA's program "Marketing the Veterinary Practice". Almost half of our membership brought their hospital staff to hear about ethical, professionally acceptable, and effective methods to promote utilization of important veterinary services by pet owners. Surveys are conducted to determine what aspect of the public information/public relations/marketing needs to be emphasized to best serve our members.

The PR Committee, under the direction of Dr. Myda Fisher, reinstated public information and brought back the "All About Animals" program to a radio format from 1988 to 1989. Members participated in live interviews and answered questions called in by the radio audience.

Other significant events occurring in 1988 included the acquisition of our first computer and the beginning of our Grief Counseling Support Group. Established to aid pet owners grieving at the loss of their pets, this group meets under the guidance of Kathy Diehl C.S.W. With the assistance of a S.E.M.V.M.A. member, this group enjoys active participation and meets twice monthly in Plymouth.

In 1975, the Council formed an awards committee to recognize Association members who have made outstanding contributions to their profession and their communities. The persons who have received these important awards are listed later in this Yearbook.

Each year, the S.E.M.V.M.A. presents these awards and installs our officers. This is done at the annual holiday party or at our January general meeting. Through the efforts of Dr. Harold Duchan, the Holiday Banquet was combined with Macomb County V.M.A. and an immensely successful holiday party has resulted. The dinner dance now includes Oakland County and Wayne County V.M.A.s, and over 350 persons attend each year. In 1982, it was held in conjunction with the 100th Annual Conference of the Michigan V.M.A.

Because many S.E.M.V.M.A. members have special interests in many fields of companion animal medicine, a Referral Portfolio was developed under the guidance of Dr. James Wright. This portfolio was designed to help our members to serve their clients better by providing more "expert" care of their pets within the metropolitan Detroit area. With the animal-owning public's increasing sophistication about "specialization", the Referral Portfolio has been a real service to our members. SEMVMA boasted its first board certified specialists with Drs. Steve Leininger (1981), Lance Adams (1982) and Paul Bloom (1984), American Board of Veterinary Practitioners; Dr. Susan Soderberg (1986) American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine; Drs. Gary Watson and Merlin Ekstrom American College of Veterinary Pathologists. In recent years our area has been blessed with an influx of additional board certified and board qualified individuals. See the SEMVMA Referral Portfolio for the names of these individuals.

In 1989, after 17 years of dedicated effort, Susan Armstrong was honored with a special award from our association. In 1990, Susan ended her tenure as administrative secretary and the responsibilities of administrative secretary were assumed by Patti Wachtel. Our office was moved to 250 South Lotz Road, Canton, Michigan.

HISTORY (cont)

In 1990's, the association recruited new members into leadership positions. This has been a hallmark of the organization — to select from its ranks, individuals truly representative of the constituency. Recent activities and successes include; the ongoing grief counseling program for clients and veterinarians, technological advances in our office (computer services, fax and voice mail capabilities), telephone listings in every phone book in the five county metro area, and the creation of a pamphlet on "The Cost of Compassion", which is available to the public. We have an active "job placement" network through the office and our

CE program is considered one of the best in the nation based on cost and the quality of the speakers we attract. Plans to take us into the next century include a committee to create a mission statement for our organization.

The officers and staff of SEMVMA hope that these brief reminiscences are of interest, and perhaps are even an inspiration to the young veterinarians upon whom our profession and our Association rely for the future.

