

 **GAVet**



See page 6
for details!

All Creatures Great & Small

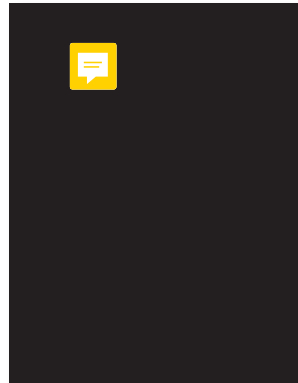
GVMA President Dr. Mike Zager

www.gvma.net

President's Message

A Rose by Any Other Name....

I personally support the name change from Veterinary Technician to Veterinary Nurse, but there is much more to this issue than just a name change. We will need standardization of nomenclature, educational levels, and state licensing issues—all of which can be dealt with by strong leadership and commitment. But it seems to me the more important issue that we are trying to promote is a career opportunity within the veterinary profession.



Dr. Mike Zager

Studies have been done showing that a well-trained Veterinary Technician/Nurse can increase productivity, improve patient care, and increase profits. I have to ask—can we produce enough Veterinary Nurses/Technicians to meet the potential need? Will this population of trained nurses/technicians be available to all levels of practices or just the big practices in big cities?

If the Veterinary Nurse/Technician is going to be a career, are we as the veterinary profession prepared to support this monetarily? How will the different levels of education/training be handled since we have some that were trained in-house, some that were trained on-line, some have a 2 year degree and others have a 4 year degree? So, if this is to become a career, we will need to make this career worthy: we need to support our own while providing quality care, decreasing animal suffering, and promoting the human-animal bond.



Dr. Mike Zager,
President, GVMA



Georgia Veterinary Medical Association
2200 Century Parkway, Suite 725
Atlanta, GA 30345
678.309.9800 • 800.853.1625
Fax: 678.309.3361 • e-mail: GVMA@gvma.net

GVMA Officers

Dr. Mike Zager..... President
(706) 632-7387 cmzager30540@gmail.com
Dr. Keri Riddick..... Immediate Past President
(706) 689-6240 • driddick@benninganimalhospital.com
Dr. Jill Lancaster..... President Elect
(478) 474-3616 • plantationcentre@bellsouth.net
Dr. Duffy JonesTreasurer
(404) 812-9880 • djones@peachtreehillsvet.com

GVMA Directors

Dr. Jackie Luckstone..... District I
(912)638-2583 • jluckstone@nvanet.com
Dr. Bo Curles..... District II
(229) 377-1803 • bocurles@gmail.com
Dr. Cairtriona Matthews District III
(706) 202-1966 • cmatthews3719@gmail.com
Dr. Hiro Iwamoto..... District IV
(404) 550-2546 • iwamotohiro@hotmail.com
Dr. Jennifer Pittman..... District V
(404) 459-0903 • Jennifer.pittman@bluepearl.com
Dr. Sherri Ray District VI
(770) 461-4211 • ronrayjr@comcast.net
Dr. John Tarabula..... District VII
770-479-0111 • jtarabula@windstream.net
Dr. Brandon Pinson..... District VIII
(478) 994-4986 • brandonpinson@gmail.com
Dr. Rachel Eddleman..... District IX
(706) 499-1676 • eddlemandvm@gmail.com
Dr. Beth Yash..... District X
(706) 549-7387 • bethyashdvm@gmail.com
Dr. Justin Toth..... District XI
(770) 419-8086 • drtoth@dhah.org
Dr. Keith Curcio..... District XII
(678) 835-3300 • info@ngvetspecialtsts.com
Dr. Seyedmehdi Mobini..... AVMA Delegate
(478) 825-6424 • mobinis@fvsu.edu
Dr. Justin Toth..... AVMA Alternate Delegate
(770) 419-8086 drtoth@dhah.org

Ex Officio

Dr. Lisa Nolan
UGA CVM..... Dean
Dr. Robert Cobb State Veterinarian
Dr. John Sundstrom..... President, State Board
Dr. Christopher Young..... USDA Veterinarian in Charge
Dr. Julie Gabel..... State Public Health
Veterinarian - GA Div. of
Public Health
Cook English..... DVM Candidate-
UGA CVM SAVMA President
Dr. Ali Daniel..... GVMA Foundation Chair

GVMA Staff

Susan Blevins..... Executive Director
Susan@gvma.net
Lindsay Corley..... Membership Manager
Lindsay@gvma.net
Billie Scroggs..... Meetings / Memb. Coordinator
Billie@gvma.net
Dr. Wendy Cuevas..... Director of Veterinary Services
Wendy@gvma.net

The Georgia Veterinarian is an official publication of the Georgia Veterinary Medical Association and editorial content and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the GVMA. Advertisement and promotion in this publication does not constitute an endorsement by the GVMA.



All Creatures Great & Small

Mike Zager knew he wanted to be a veterinarian at the age of 14. He was working as a kennel tech at a clinic in Griffin where he developed a passion for caring for animals and says that with a little “divine intervention” was able to attend the University of Georgia’s College of Veterinary Medicine. He was drawn to mixed animal practice when he realized he would rather be outside than work within the confines of a clinic. During his senior year, he interviewed for a position in Statesboro when a professor suggested he visit a veterinarian in Ellijay who was in need of large animal help. Zager took the position thinking he would stay 3-4 years, yet, over 40 years later, he still calls Ellijay and Ocoee Animal Hospital his home.

The make-up of the North Georgia Mountains has changed, Zager says, since the addition of Highway 515 which connects the once small rural towns of Blue Ridge, Ellijay, and Cherry Log, to suburban Atlanta. The area has become a weekend get-away filled with rental cabins and apple orchards. Mixed in are small family farms passed down from generation to generation. The farms are still vital to the local economy and are where “Dr. Mike” focuses most of this work. After driving 20 minutes from the main road to a place where the windy mountain roads turn from pavement to dirt is where you will find Davis Farm. Dr. Zager has spent years caring for the family’s prized Angus heifers. These animals know the truck of their owner, Mitchell Davis, and take a break from lounging under the picturesque mountain view after he signals, “come on girls.” His wife has named one of the cows, Lucy, who nudges the back of his leg in hopes of receiving some grain. Dr. Zager stands in the middle, petting the animals, unafraid of their size and strength. He says his favorite part of the job, other than caring for animals, is the relationships with clients like Mitchell and his family. These heifers are the family’s livelihood and they have partnered for several years with Dr. Zager to make sure they not only receive the best medical care, but also one day fetch top dollar at a sale barn.

When asked to describe his life as a mixed animal veterinarian, Dr. Mike Zager refers to the books written by the famed British veterinarian, James Herriot. Like Herriot, the years of unpredictability that comes with practicing mixed animal medicine have left him with plenty of good stories. “One dark and stormy night, I got called to a farm on the top of a mountain to help a laboring cow in distress. These people are not serious cattle people, they see these cows more as pets, and this poor little heifer was working so hard trying to have her baby but this calf just didn’t want to come out. She was also, obviously, not in the best mood! I go into the barn and over to her stall to give her a light tranquilizer so I can perform an exam. At which time she looks at me, snorts, and charges through the electric fence and out into the woods. Now remember, I started this story with saying it’s a dark and stormy night! So I now have an anxious cow, in the middle of the woods, on a dark and stormy night. I am looking around and thinking, “How are we going to find this girl?” I eventually found her by spotting the green reflection in the back of her eyes. Because she was a little sedated at this point we were able to get a rope around her, tie her up, and help to deliver her calf out in the middle of the rain!”

A typical day for Dr. Zager consists of hours spent driving in his specially equipped truck making farm calls to administer vaccines, carry out routine blood work, and perform castrations. However, his life is rarely 9:00-5:00 and he must adjust, accommodate, and improvise to practice medicine out in the field. “One time when it was snowing a cow broke her confines and came charging towards me. Even though I am no “Roy Rogers”, I somehow managed to get my lasso around her neck. She had just given birth and was still really upset and not able to feed her baby. Her poor little calf was just lying in the snow and we knew it was not a good situation. Somehow we were able to secure the cow, milk her, and give the calf the colostrum to survive.”

In resemblance to the connections in James Herriot’s books, Dr. Zager has formed strong bonds not only with the animals, but the people that he regularly visits. One such woman is Tracy Pearson who walked into Dr. Zager’s practice 27 years ago and asked if he knew anything about llamas. Zager replied that even though he didn’t have experience with llamas, he was willing

“Dr. Zager has formed strong bonds not only with the animals, but the people that he regularly visits.”



Dr. Zager with Tracy Pearson. Dr Zager has cared for Ms. Pearson's beloved llama's for over 27 years.



Dr. Zager at Davis Farms in the North Georgia mountains.

births since they tend to have their babies in the morning versus the middle of the night. Mrs. Pearson warns to not stare directly at the llamas, as they may spit if they feel threatened. Llamas are not generally known to be friendly, but after generations of selective breeding and handling, Ms. Tracey's llamas are much more affectionate. She treasures her relationship with her "Llama Doctor", a sentiment shared by her llamas as they huddle around Dr. Zager and try to give a hello "kiss".

Not uncommon in the life of a mixed or large animal veterinarian, Dr. Zager recently injured his leg after being kicked by a horse during an exam. Ms. Tracey was one of the first people to stop by his home with a pot of chicken noodle soup to wish him well. To Dr. Zager, the backbone of veterinary medicine is relationships—to care for all creatures, human and animals, great and small.



Mitchell Davis, a client of Dr. Zager, with his Angus heifers.

to learn and give it a try. At one point, Ms. Tracy owned over 400 llamas, which she knows individually by name, lineage, and personality. Dr. Zager has been involved in the care of her beloved llamas from birth to grave, comparing their medical needs to those found in equine medicine. He has delivered hundreds of babies at Pearson Pond Llamas and says with a smile that he prefers llama

To Dr. Zager, the backbone of veterinary medicine is relationships—to care for all creatures, human and animals, great and small.

Q&A with GVMA President Dr. Mike Zager

How did you first become involved with the GVMA?

Dr. Jim McClaren invited me to participate as an assistant director for my district. As a result, I got exposed to everything that the GVMA does. I was able to see the scope and impact of the GVMA's efforts, even though it's not always immediately felt, on behalf of veterinarians each day. I wanted to participate in that.

What is the biggest change that you have seen in veterinary medicine since you began practicing?

Technology is the biggest change I have seen. What was available diagnostically when I started in 1979 is very different from today. If I needed a CBC, I would have to send it off to a lab and it could take between 5-7 days. The animal was either better or dead by then! However, technology cannot take the place of the personal relationship that you need to have to take care of the animal and the client.

What do you hope to accomplish as the new GVMA President?

I have no personal agenda and just hope to “keep the train from running off the tracks.” For example, a past President of the GVMA was involved in state lobbying efforts to ensure that veterinarians continue to be the sole provider of rabies injections. I think it is important for our organization to respond to the current needs of veterinarians which includes the veterinary nurse initiative, telemedicine, and modernizing the Practice Act.

The GVMA is our professional organization. There is no one out there that is promoting and advocating for the veterinarian in the way that the GVMA does. The GVMA plays an extremely important role and by being a member, we are supporting all veterinarians in the state of Georgia.

Veterinary medicine is experiencing a shortage of mixed animal practitioners. Can you speak to the challenges of practicing mixed animal medicine?

I feel very blessed that I love what I do. So much of it is personal lifestyle. You can't make someone who is not interested in mixed animal want to do this work. On the other hand, in this day and age where you have student debt at all time high levels you can't ask new grads to come out of vet school and take a \$15,000 to \$20,000 pay decrease to work in a rural practice. So, a good part of the challenge for mixed and large animal veterinarians is economics which is a challenge for veterinarians in general. How do we charge fairly so we can be compensated accordingly, while still providing good care of the animals? Finding large animal practitioners has been a challenge since I started as a vet.

Mental health issues have come to the forefront of veterinary medicine. How have you managed work/life balance over your veterinary career?

I would be remiss and a fool to say that, for me, work/life balance comes by having the right life partner. My wife is very understanding and that has made life a whole lot easier, even when we were faced with difficult circumstances. At one point, we were raising two children and my father-in-law lived with us. A lot of the responsibility ended up on my wife and she handled it with grace, professionalism, and poise. You have to work together as a team and try to do your part and not assume the other one is going to do things.



Dr. Zager at ...roping.



Dr. Michael J. Zager is one of the veterinarians and co-owners of Ocoee Animal Hospital. He began practicing veterinary medicine 1979 and his professional interests include large animal medicine and surgery, including dentistry and reproduction.

Dr. Zager received his undergraduate degree from the University of Georgia of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. He also completed his pre-vet in food and animal science. He completed veterinary school at the University of Georgia of Veterinary Medicine in 1979 focusing on veterinary care.

Dr. Zager and his wife Cindy enjoy hiking, traveling, and going to the theater. They have two grown daughters and a labrador retriever.