

Alumni Profile:

Lori D. Leonard, D.V.M.

Alumna recalls special times, special people

Editor's note: Lori Leonard first graduated from Purdue in 1978. She wrote this letter to friends and colleagues on campus as a way of saying thank you to those who helped her along the way. She graciously agreed to share some of her fond memories with us.

It has been 20 years since I graduated from Purdue University. The first time, that is. Since then, I was on active duty in the United States Air Force (I'm still active in the Air National Guard), completed my veterinary education at Purdue and became a practicing veterinarian in 1989.

I am a major, currently assigned to the 192 Mission Support Flight, which is part of the 192 Fighter Wing with the Virginia Air National Guard. What happened recently in Kosovo added more possibilities to how we serve our country. Our unit was ready, trained and able to go.

My love for the Air Force goes back to my days as an undergraduate at Purdue. I participated in the Air Force ROTC program. While I was in the School of Veterinary Medicine, I was assigned to Grissom Air Force Base as a member of the Air Force Reserve.

I developed a strong background in research techniques at Purdue, which arose from the need to earn money. I paid my own way through school. Graduating in three years saved me a great deal of money.

To help make ends meet, I washed test tubes and glassware. Washing test tubes is an important job. Any residue left on the glass could affect an experiment.

Through my research experience, I learned to enhance my skills of observation and critical thinking, pay attention to details, and record events accurately in a scientific journal.

I learned to question the outcome of an experiment if it wasn't repeatable, or if the outcome did not agree with the hypothesis. That "scientific method" was really an important bunch of rules to understand and apply at Purdue.

From dimly lit ancient laboratories to bright, humid greenhouses, I watched the scientific method in action. Dr. John Roberts and I did research with wheat hybrids. We spent hours looking through the microscope, making sketches, going to greenhouses and visiting agronomy plots.

He had such a good sense of humor, a joy of life and a carefree manner that made every day seem happy.

One of my part-time jobs was working for Rita Barr in her laboratory. Rita was doing research with spinach chloroplasts. She had done that for years and is probably still at it! What a tireless worker. Nothing got past her. She must have had eyes in the back of her head.

One had to be consistent, accurate and dependable to work with her. In the early morning, I would go to Rita's lab and wash spinach. The leaves were "blenderized" in preparation for the day's tedious research process. It wasn't until many years later that I could actually enjoy eating a fresh spinach salad.

Rita was very kind-hearted. She fed the birds at Lynn Hall every day, and boy, did she make a mean leek soup! She was one of my first bosses and a good role model. I miss her very much.

In soils and crops labs, I was a student assistant. The professors were fun to work with and helping to teach actually helped me learn! (Maybe that was the point?) Dr. Eldon Hood guided me in understanding the identification and habitat of numerous seeds, stalks, leaves and other plant parts.

By examining a tiny piece of a plant, Dr. Hood could tell a tale about its origins, life history, uses and value on the commodities market. He was extremely patient. I know, because I was always asking questions and he always had an answer.

The agronomy chicken barbecue was an annual event. I once helped advertise the event by dressing up as a chicken



photos provided
Dr. Lori Leonard wears two uniforms at work. She wears a lab coat as owner of Concord (Va.) Veterinary Services, but switches to the uniform of the United States Air National Guard, where she holds the rank of major. Leonard wore another "uniform" briefly during her undergraduate days when she dressed like a chicken (right) to help promote the annual agronomy chicken barbecue.

and walking around campus. I wore gold velour hot pants, bright yellow tights, and strapped huge three-toed chicken feet to the tops of my shoes. Dr. Van Scoyoc barbecued some delicious chicken. He always seemed to be laughing and smiling, and always had something positive to say.

In the Ag Alumni office was jolly Mauri

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Williamson. He had a great memory and a gift for storytelling. We had to watch out during the annual Ag Alumni Fish Fry. He would emcee and roast just about everybody in the room. Dr. Hansen, president of Purdue University, would dress up in costume and get into the act with Mauri. They would have all kinds of gags for entertainment.

One of the nice things I remember about the School of Agriculture was its open-door policy. Even the dean, Dr. Jack Long, would set aside time in his busy schedule to sit down and talk with me. For a while, I was convinced that his primary purpose was to be accessible to the students. I had no idea about his major duties and responsibilities as dean.

Students were encouraged to get involved. Nothing was held back. There weren't any secrets or discrimination. As long as you were motivated, a great education was available to you. You could take in as much or as little knowledge as you wanted.

I, along with many other students, was invited to the Hansens' home. That was really special to me. I remember their graciousness and hospitality. They were involved in all kinds of student activities and were great spokespersons for Purdue. I'd see them at football games and convocations, even at the Sweet Shop.

The love and support of my parents is a critical part of my being, but there were several other people at Purdue to whom I owe a huge debt of gratitude.

Tall and fun-loving, Dr. Jim Ahlrichs was always ready to help solve a crisis and calmly offer advice. He was involved in many activities and everyone loved him. Fair and thorough in his teaching, he had a great sense of humor and tireless energy.

Dr. Chuck Rhykerd was my main mentor, confidant and role model. I remember spending lots of time in his office, discussing the concerns of the day or asking questions about class. He helped me wrestle with the anxieties of an 18- to 21-year-old student. He provided good direction and guidance. He genuinely cared for his students. He was always there.

I was intrigued by his involvement in the international arena. There were many foreign students on campus, and diversification was the name of the game at Purdue long before it became politically correct.

Everywhere I go, I take so much of Purdue with me. I lived in California, Texas, Florida, Montana, West Germany (with tours to Sardinia, Italy, Denmark and Saudi Arabia), Indiana, North Carolina and, now, Concord, a small town in west central Virginia, halfway between Lynchburg and Appomattox.

I have owned my own business, Concord Veterinary Services, since February 1993. We see primarily dogs and cats, but I have a special interest in wild animals, particularly birds of prey. I'm a federally licensed wildlife rehabilitator. When I get an injured hawk or owl to work on, I'm ecstatic. All of that work is done at no charge. After all, how can you bill Mother Nature?

I have many great memories of Purdue and its people. To all of the faculty and staff in the School of Agriculture, thank you for a great education (scholastic as well as learning life's lessons). Keep up the good work!