



Research to protect, treat and cure animals.

Thank Your Vet for a Healthy Pet® Contest

Northeast Winner:

Lee W. Morgan, DVM, DABVP

Georgetown Veterinary Hospital, Washington, D.C.

Nominated by: Mary Lynn Reed and Scott Sonntag

What does winning the Thank Your Vet for a Healthy Pet® award mean to you?

I am extremely honored for the Thank Your Vet for a Healthy Pet® award. This by far is the most meaningful award I have been given. Perhaps the greatest reason is because one of my clients nominated me. It is very flattering and humbling. Of course, winning such a prestigious award compels one to commit to becoming an even better vet!

When did you decide to become a veterinarian and why?

Having had pets all my life, I had a long-standing interest in veterinary medicine. I started to think seriously about it as a career while finishing my master's degree in marine science at the College of William & Mary. Because I had a job training dolphins prior to receiving my master's degree, I was the de facto stranding coordinator for any stranded marine mammals. I had a good friend who was a vet who helped me with the strandings, and I thought it was really cool that he had a knowledge base that allowed him to work on any animal. In addition, I was intrigued that he could utilize his skills on real-world situations every day.

Who were the special animals in your life (past or current)?

On our first-year anniversary, my wife bought me a Siberian husky we named Sabo. Unfortunately, someone shot Sabo, necessitating the amputation of his left forelimb. He did very well and lived to be 15 years old. I credit him with saving the life of at least two dogs. When I was an intern at SouthPaws Veterinary Referral Center, a young Labrador retriever came in after being hit by a car. His leg was mangled beyond repair and we recommended amputation. The owners wanted to put the dog down because he would be "crippled." I told them to wait and went home to get Sabo. When they saw how well Sabo functioned on three legs, they went ahead with the surgery! The dog did very well for the rest of his life.

How long have you been a practicing veterinarian?

I have been a practicing vet for 13 years, having graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1996.

What are the most memorable experiences you've had in your career?

The most memorable case I had was during my first year of practice. An elderly gentleman came in with a cat that looked very diseased. I noticed his Eastern European accent and asked him if that was where he was from. He said he was born in Poland but had to live in Germany for a while. As I collected the cat's history and physical exam findings, I conferred with our internist Dr. McConnell to outline an appropriate diagnostic and treatment regime. I mentioned the owner appeared to be rather destitute and I wondered if he could afford the treatment. Dr. McConnell told me our client had been held in a concentration camp during World War II. During his internment, he befriended a cat in the camp. Caring for the cat helped him keep his humanity. He credits the cat with saving his life and vowed to return the favor to any cat that found its way into his life. He had three older cats that had every sort of disease, but they thrived under his care. I have always felt that if I were to do nothing further in my life, I was able to help this man.

What is your care philosophy toward your animal patients and their owners?

My care philosophy is to work with clients to adopt the most appropriate care for their animal companions. This involves talking *with* clients, not *at* them. When the owners feel that they helped develop a care plan, they are more likely to implement it.

What type of volunteer work do you do?

My volunteer work involves providing no-cost veterinary care to guide dogs and service dogs with the Seeing Eye Foundation and Guiding Eyes for the Blind. My own charity, the Robert Walter Morgan Foundation, is raising funds to buy a mobile veterinary clinic for the Washington, D.C., K-9 Unit. This will allow police dogs to get veterinary care while deployed in the field.

Do you encourage your clients to do their own pet health research?

Yes, I feel that the more educated clients are the more likely they are to follow your recommendations. They can see why you suggest a particular course of care. The Web site I use most often is the University of Pennsylvania's School of Veterinary Medicine.

How do you use research in your practice?

Certainly we keep up to date with the current veterinary practices by attending continuing education meetings and seminars, as well as subscribing to several journals. Since I have a background in research, I have published several studies including work with dolphins, seals and even a 3,000-year-old mummified falcon from ancient Egypt.

What is the most rewarding aspect of your professional life?

The most rewarding aspect is helping people every day and seeing the gratitude they express. Even though we work with animals, veterinary medicine is absolutely a people business.

How has the profession changed since you became a doctor? What changes do you expect in the future?

Perhaps the biggest change I have witnessed is the profession's commitment to wellness care for pets, including early detection of diseases and pathology prior to a disease actually manifesting itself. As you might imagine, early detection facilitates therapy.