



# Time to Shine

After 50 Years of Accreditation, Manheim Pike Veterinary Hospital Wins Practice of the Year



by Jen Reeder

IN 1970, MANHEIM PIKE VETERINARY HOSPITAL was a little practice in a cornfield in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Many pet dogs slept chained in their owners' yards. Email and the internet did not yet exist. But AAHA did, and Manheim Pike Veterinary Hospital became AAHA accredited.

AAHA accreditation helped steer the practice through remarkable changes. Homes and businesses cropped up in the surrounding neighborhood. Pets were increasingly considered members of the family—sometimes even sleeping between spouses in bed. The internet ushered in

the digital age. The practice invested in technology, major remodeling projects, and staff as it continued to grow.

After 50 years of accreditation and evolution, Manheim Pike Veterinary Hospital has become the 2020 AAHA-Accredited Practice of the Year.

“AAHA challenges you to stay on top of the latest developments: the best medicine, equipment, and protocols,” said practice owner Jeff Steed, DVM. “Being an AAHA-accredited practice continues to challenge us to be the best we can be. To do the best job that we can.”

## Group Effort

Steed, the son of a veterinarian, joined the practice in 1998 and bought it about a year later. He is quick to share credit for the practice's success with others: from the founders, Donald Herr, DVM, and Patricia Thompson, DVM, to the team he's hired with longtime practice manager Denise Warner.

"The two of us have really assembled what we think is just a fantastic team of people who enjoy working together. They enjoy coming to work every day, even when it's busy and crazy," he said. "I don't know what the key to that is other than treating people with respect and dignity, as you would want them to treat you."

Warner has worked at Manheim Pike Veterinary Hospital even longer than Steed: 33 years.

"Nothing beeped when I started here," she said with a laugh. "Now everything beeps. The door beeps, our phones beep when they've been on hold too long, our computers beep constantly. We have heart monitors that are beeping all the time, breath monitors that are beeping. So that's always my joke."

Warner agrees that the team is phenomenal, so she has worked to bolster morale during the challenges of 2020. When curbside protocols were constantly changing at the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in March, she instituted curbside bingo with prizes—and squares ranging from "client agreed to bloodwork" to "cat not in a carrier" and "broken umbrella."

"In Pennsylvania, we had a super rainy spring, and our poor [staff] had to go outside to bring in animals every single day in the pouring rain," she recalled. "I take my hat off to them because they did a fantastic job and they did not complain."

A few years ago at AAHA's Connexity, Warner was moved by speaker Kevin Brown saying not all heroes wear capes. Back at the practice, she decorated the meeting room with capes and Batman plates and napkins because she considers veterinary workers to be heroes. When the pandemic struck, she decorated bathroom mirrors with the name of each person on the team and a centered note that reads, "Heroes stand here."

"So when you look at your reflection, you see a hero standing there," she said. "That's you."

Another COVID adjustment: The social media team has been posting short bios of each team member with a photo of them holding a whimsical sign that reads, "There are 40 feet in my house." (The figure differs by person, of course.) Each photo is tagged #EssentialAndAwesome.

That essential and awesome team has worked hard to accommodate the "COVID puppy" boom, with 160 new patients in June alone. Additionally, all employees at Manheim Pike Veterinary Hospital rotate to work at the practice's two satellite locations, Metro Pet Vet—Leola and Metro Pet Vet—Downtown. Because employees were already meeting AAHA's standards at each practice, Warner pursued official accreditation—despite a raging pandemic.

Both practices achieved AAHA accreditation on June 30, 2020.

"All of our protocols were the same in everything that we do, and we live AAHA every day," she said. "So it was time to get them accredited."

## Fierce Loyalty

Beth Nelms, VMD, grew up in Manheim Township and interned and worked at Manheim Pike Veterinary Hospital during the summers from 2000 to 2003. She moved away for veterinary school and then to be closer to family during a medical situation, but rejoined Manheim Pike Veterinary Hospital as a veterinarian in 2012, when Steed mentioned an upcoming vacancy.

"It was always my goal to come back to Manheim Pike to work as a veterinarian because I loved the whole team," she said. "We definitely are very much like a family."

A testament to that is how many employees will leave for personal issues but then come back. Several employees love the workplace so much that their siblings have joined the team.

"We create a really good atmosphere and tend to hire the right people," she said.



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—PRACTICE OWNER JEFF STEED, DVM

Nelms is a devoted fan of the Philadelphia Phillies baseball team, sometimes taking a day off to catch a game or using vacation time to travel to watch games out of state. Her own team supports that passion.

“There’s only one employee who’s a Yankees fan who ribs me gently about how the Phillies are doing or not doing or that the Yankees just beat them,” she said with a laugh. “But I would say they’re pretty supportive. Everybody works hard at our team, so we do need those days off to relax.”

She appreciates efforts leadership takes to boost practice morale. For instance, Steed will personally tell clients who are rude to the front desk that such behavior won’t be tolerated. Monthly meetings feature a fishbowl with little notes from coworkers encouraging and thanking members of the team for acts of kindness or support, which people take turns reading to the group. Compliments from clients are included, too.

Annual evaluations between each team member and the managers offer a chance for both sides to discuss what’s working and what they’d like to improve in the upcoming year. For instance, if an employee wants to boost their skills in blood draws, the entire team will encourage them toward that goal.

“Those are two things that I think really help foster the team,” Nelms said. “We realize, ‘I’m a core part of this process, and I can do better. I want to do better. They’re encouraging me to do better.’”

Veterinary technician Sarah Dohren appreciates that technicians are “used wisely” at the practice and have the chance to use all the skills they learned getting their degree—anything a veterinarian can do except diagnose, prescribe, or perform surgery.

“It’s helpful for the veterinarians to give us that kind of support for our job, and it just makes things go so much smoother,” she said. “We do all sorts of things here, and that’s so the doctor can move on and do what the doctor does, what they’re getting paid for.”

Outstanding medical care has garnered Manheim Pike Veterinary Hospital a strong reputation in the community. Thanks to votes from readers, *Lancaster County Magazine* has awarded the practice with the Best of Lancaster Award for the past two years.

“We say, ‘Our ordinary is extraordinary,’” Dohren said. “We go above and beyond, and the clients now almost expect that from us.”

### **Deep Community Connections**

That exemplary service to the community extends to giving back. Last year, two kittens were badly injured in a house fire. One of the firefighters is a client of Manheim Pike Veterinary Hospital and suggested the little felines be brought to the practice to see if they could be saved.

Sure enough, the team nursed the kittens, dubbed Roasty and Toasty, back to health. Their owner relinquished

one, so Roasty now lives with one of the technicians who helped save his life.

Laurin Dickson, client service representative, took her dogs to Manheim Pike Veterinary Hospital even when she worked at another practice because she trusted the level of care so deeply. Since joining the Manheim Pike Veterinary Hospital team, she's amazed by the myriad ways the practice gives back to the community, such as through free exams and market-price vaccinations and medications for police K-9s and other working dogs—from service dogs for people with disabilities to search-and-rescue dogs.

"We're really big on providing extra-special care for those pets who are providing extra-special care, I guess is the best way to put it," she said.

Manheim Pike Veterinary Hospital supports several local rescue organizations with free or discounted services for animals in foster care. Dickson is active in rescue and has a "rotating door" of fosters. When her two current foster dogs were attacked, veterinarians gave the pups terrific care as well as generous discounts for their services.

Likewise, if someone finds a cat and brings it to the hospital, the team internally calls it a "Good Samaritan" exam and charges less than a typical new patient exam.

"They've just been really phenomenal at being flexible and working with pets who may not have been able to receive care otherwise," she said.

Manheim Pike stays connected to the community by hosting booths at local events and even organizing their own. Just before the coronavirus pandemic shut everything down, the practice had organized a "Pup Crawl" to get pet lovers to visit local dog-friendly businesses for giveaways.

"I've been here for over a year and I'm still blown away by how generous and how flexible we are with working with outside organizations," she said. "It's genuine. It's not because people are looking, and not because people are trying to pay us off or threatening us otherwise, it's just because the practice owner and the doctors here just have genuinely good hearts. It's really refreshing to see."

Lancaster resident Mark Bair and his wife have been bringing their pets to Manheim Pike Veterinary Hospital for 33 years. It started with a recommendation from a friend in the show-dog circuit who also handles Tibetan terriers. Since then, the couple has trusted all their dogs—all champions—to Manheim Pike Veterinary Hospital, including their current dogs, Randi and Misty.

"We've always tried to give them the best care that we could, and we felt that Manheim Pike was the best that we could do," he said. "My wife and I, and the people that we've referred there, we've always been 100% satisfied. They've kept up with all the modern technology, all the modern procedures, so you know it's a modern practice."

When their dog Sassie was eight years old, she blew out a knee in the yard and needed cruciate ligament surgery at Manheim Pike Veterinary Hospital. Sassie lived to be 16 and never had another problem with that knee.

Another pet, Rosie, cracked a tooth while chewing on a toy and Manheim Pike performed a successful root canal.

Bair appreciates that the veterinary team has always shown compassion whenever the couple's beloved dogs need to be euthanized. Numerous veterinarians at Manheim Pike Veterinary Hospital have helped shepherd them through end-of-life care with pets, including their "Best in Specialty" show dog, Paris, at age 16 last year.

"They're never in a hurry, and they never rush you," he said. "They're very, very accommodating."

Bair emphasized that Manheim Pike Veterinary Hospital is exceptionally clean. His wife is a retired microbiologist who specialized in bacteriology, so he said she's a bit of a germaphobe, as one might expect.

"Cleanliness means just everything to her, and that is the cleanest place you can go into," he said. "I just think it's a first-class veterinary operation." ❖



Award-winning journalist Jen Reeder is a frequent contributor to *Trends*.