

in the community

Shaping the Next Generation

by Sarah Rumble

“I wanted to be a veterinarian until I saw a video of a vet performing surgery on a dog. Then I decided I wanted to be a pianist.”

—AMY LEE

It's been 45 years since Pat Kennedy Arrington, DVM, CVFP, hospital director at AAHA-accredited Jefferson Animal Hospitals and Regional Emergency Center, graduated from veterinary school. But it doesn't feel like that long ago for Arrington, who is passionate about helping young people understand what it takes to have a career in veterinary medicine.

“I've always had a strong interest in mentoring students about veterinary medicine,” says Arrington. “Many students think they want to be a veterinarian but haven't been advised that they need strong education in the sciences to be able to perform well and to be accepted into a veterinary curriculum. It's not enough to have a love of animals, although that is important.”

Arrington often speaks to students interested in learning more about the veterinary profession. One program that Arrington recalls having a big impact was her Exploring Post program, sponsored by the Boy Scouts of America from 1985 to 2005. The program gave young men and women aged 14 to 21 the opportunity to learn what a career as a veterinarian entails.

“I remember one of my exploring students telling me he wanted to be a veterinarian but he just couldn't put a thermometer into an animal's rear. He said it was too disgusting,” says Arrington. “It's important to ensure students have a truthful impression of the requirements of becoming a good veterinarian.”

Through the Exploring Post program, Arrington hosted seminars and hands-on demonstrations in emergency medicine, first aid, exotic pet care, clinical exam techniques, animal diseases, behavior, surgery, and more. She also covered the career options available in veterinary medicine and took students on field trips.

Holly Roberts, DVM, MS, DACVD, was one student who benefitted from Arrington's mentorship. As a ninth grader, Roberts was interested in veterinary medicine. “Prior to this program, I had no idea that veterinary medicine had so many different facets and possibilities—it solidified my desire to join the field,” says Roberts, who went on to earn her DVM and become board certified in dermatology. She currently works as a dermatology specialist in Fairfax, Va. “I'm forever grateful to [Arrington] for her guidance and friendship through this journey.”

“I know of three of our students who went on to vet school and are currently practicing, and there may be more,” says Arrington. “We are all proud of the achievements of our students from the Exploring Post program.” ✨



Denver-based writer and editor Sarah Rumble has written for the veterinary community since 2011. She still has dreams of one day becoming a veterinarian (but she'll probably keep her day job as a writer for now).