CVMA125 – 125 Years of Organized Veterinary Medicine

The CVMA was the fourteenth state in the union to have a state veterinary association when it was formed in 1888. As part of our year-long anniversary celebration, we’re looking back on the CVMA’s history.

The CVMA and Constituent VMAs – How They Got Started

California has 38 geographic constituent and non-geographic constituent associations, which vary in size, age and composition (CVMA.net lists them all and provides online access to your association). Each of the CVMA’s constituent associations is represented on the Board of Governors and in the House of Delegates. Such active participation promotes understanding between constituent associations and serves as a vital link to professional veterinary activities throughout the state of California.

Today, networking with your colleagues, sharing a dinner, catching up on the latest news and attending local continuing education courses are just some of the benefits of being active in your constituent association. But what other reasons have there been for the formation of some of California’s geographic VMAs? Below we give a few of those reasons.

Alameda-Contra Costa VMA: First formed in 1929, in the 1950s this group was among the first to recognize the work that veterinary assistants were doing in practices. They strove to improve the education and capabilities of veterinary assistants, achieve their future accreditation and also a semi-professional status for veterinary assistants.

Mendo-Lake VMA: Six local veterinarians met in 1958 at the Mira Vista Hotel in Ukiah to discuss the state brucellosis program and organize this VMA.

Northern San Joaquin VMA: The present-day version of this association was formed in 1942 to organize the mastitis control program for the state and continued to meet regularly.

Peninsula VMA: Six veterinarians met in 1946 to form this VMA and also set up an emergency system to take care of calls after normal office hours and on Sundays and holidays – one of the first such coverage systems in the country. One hospital in each area was chosen to serve daily in rotation to attend to after-hours calls.
San Diego VMA: This VMA was formed in 1926 and one of the group’s major contributions to the profession was the establishment of the first Boy Scout Explorer Post of its kind, at the San Diego Zoo. By 1967 it also offered a speaker’s bureau, its motto being, “Don’t wait for someone to come to you – take Veterinary Medicine to them.”

San Francisco VMA: In 1927, all the veterinarians in the city were invited to a dinner meeting at the Hof-Brau Restaurant on Market Street to discuss an outbreak of rabies in the city. As the dinner meeting was so pleasant and led to recognition of mutual professional concerns, it was decided to meet for dinner monthly.

San Joaquin Valley VMA: Organized in 1917 (and since divided into the Northern San Joaquin and Central California VMAs), this VMA in 1919 adopted as its official insignia the caduceus with the superimposed V that had been assigned to the officers of the Veterinary Corps of the U.S. Army in 1916. This association offered it to the California State VMA, which adopted it for a time, and then offered it to the AVMA, which adopted it as its official emblem.

Southern California VMA: The SCVMA, organized in 1919, sprang out of several other organizations: the Southern Auxiliary of the CSVMA (the earlier name of the CVMA), formed in 1889 – the first local association in California; the Los Angeles VMA, formed in 1911; and the Small Animal Veterinary Association of Southern California, formed in 1925, which in the late 1940s became a part of the SCVMA. In 1955, the SCVMA grew stronger when it responded to defeat the Pet Health Plan, Inc. (PHP) proposal to provide health insurance to animals. For $30 a year, an animal owner would have all their needs taken care of, either in proposed gigantic hospitals with 15 veterinarians, or at secondary hospitals which would employ their original owners on a salary basis. Patients in areas outside of the PHP network would take their animals to local veterinarians at set fees for services. Most veterinarians refused to align themselves with PHP and membership in the SCVMA and other nearby local VMAs increased dramatically as veterinarians united against this perceived threat to their profession. The PHP program collapsed in 1957, unable to employ enough veterinarians. The SCVMA is now the largest local association in any state.


CVMA Rewards

As the CVMA celebrates 125 years, we want to thank our members. In honor of this celebration, we are giving away rewards. On Feb. 25, the CVMA randomly selected one entry for a free full conference registration to the Pacific Veterinary Conference. The member who won that drawing was Dr. Daniel Heistand.

On March 15 two more free PacVet registrations for CVMA members were given away. On April 15 we will give away five more PacVet registrations. Got to CVMA.net to enter the final drawing.