

Meet the President

Dirk Yelinek, DVM

My favorite food is Maine lobster. I grew up in Springfield, MA. My favorite weather is overcast in the morning and in the evening with a foggy mist on the ground and sunshine during the day. I long for an occasional thunderstorm. My favorite color is blue, like the oceans where I spend most of my free time with my wife, Patti, exploring the surface of the seas by sailing and the depths by scuba diving. These are my happy places.

My other happy place, aside from the home we have made together with our pets encompasses my life's work—my practice, organized veterinary medicine, and giving to other causes.

My interest in animal life was influenced by my grandfather, Arthur James Beebe, and my uncle, Arthur James Beebe, Junior. My grandfather had a small farm in East Lyme, CT.

I remember learning to candle chicken eggs in the farmhouse basement and the necessity to stay clear of the Angus cattle "staked out" in the pasture and on the front and side yards. I also learned it was not a good idea to lock your grandfather in the chicken coop with my cousins.

My uncle Jimmy exposed me to the sciences as well as the government when I visited the places where he was based as director of the Food and Drug Administration for New England. He exposed me to the wonders of health and science at the Smithsonian Institution, a handshake with Sen. Ted Kennedy, and a solemn visit to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Before I turned 10, my dad took me and my brother to Springfield College, where he moonlighted as an auxiliary policeman on Saturdays. He had a huge set of keys that opened doors—and my eyes. From the age of six to 10 years old, I was mystified by the biology labs there. I soon became interested in biology. I also learned to swim and dive there in an Olympic-sized pool that influenced me to swim competitively.

My high school years were filled with band, soccer, swimming, and skipping out of homeroom to play pool. In student government, something I didn't think I'd like, I found that being one of the decision makers gave me a sense of pride and satisfaction. The collaborative work for common goals was a valuable lesson.



During my freshman year, my dad gave me Logger (dog), my life-long family pet friend (in memory and inspiration). This led to me applying for an after school job at the Boston Road Animal Hospital. I am forever grateful to the owners, Drs. Richard Hersman and Michael Rihm, who became my mentors. I tried to emulate these veterinarians, who were trusted and loved because of the care they gave peoples' pets. I saw that being a veterinarian exemplified honesty, integrity, trust, and respect.

After high school, I was accepted to the animal science program at the Ohio State University. During the student-parent orientation, my mom and I both got a clear message in separate counseling sessions: I should go home because getting accepted to any veterinary college is much too difficult and arduous.

It wasn't easy. There were four rigorous years of study, working weekends and summers, and a work-study program. I had an apartment and paid utilities as a Columbus resident so I could apply later as a state resident to the Ohio State Veterinary College. I was accepted! As Dean Phil Nelson of Western University in Pomona tells his entering classes, "Veterinary medicine CHOSE ME."

Upon graduation, I headed west and eventually landed on the beaches of the South Bay near Los Angeles. I was attracted to the quality of medicine being practiced there and the beauty of the place. Winters in Massachusetts were behind me.

I spent a few years as an associate, then made house calls, and did relief work for 15 years. In 2004, I started my practice, the Redondo Shores Veterinary Center, a conventional and integrative veterinary practice. I have never looked back.

I served the Southern California VMA first as the South Bay chapter president and in 2014, as the association president. Then I went to the CVMA House of Delegates, joining the Board of Governors in 2015. I currently serve as an AVMA delegate and president of both the American Academy of Veterinary Acupuncture and the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association.

My wife Patti and I have two dogs and four or so cats, depending on how much food we put outside.

For the past 14 years, I have worked intermittently as a member of the National Veterinary Response Team (NVRT) of the National Disaster Medical System under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NVRT has 85 members across the country.

My deployment destinations, starting as a member of the Veterinary Medical Assistance Team that later

morphed into the NVRT, have included Virginia during an Avian Influenza outbreak in 2002 and Hurricane Rita in Texas in 2006. My most recent position in the NVRT was as leader of FEMA Region IX, which includes Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, and Pacific territories.

It is an honor to serve as CVMA president. That is my priority. I will do my best to rely on common sense without pretense or bias. Facts will be my resources—what works and what doesn't. I will not be the loudest voice in the room. Our collective experience and knowledge will bring successful outcomes. Communication is key. Compromise and consensus are in our vocabulary. I will advance cautiously to confront disaster, not run from it.

This is a wonderful profession and I'm grateful and proud to be a part of it. I will work to make it better. Now, more than ever, we must grasp the innovations the future brings. What can we do globally to make a difference? We must recruit and train young leaders who think flexibly and have the energy to lead an ever changing profession.

I believe that we should meet our challenges as opportunities for the future. The virus that has become a pandemic and the adaptation required to mitigate its effects were not predictable. Our involvement in One Health becomes ever more important as veterinarians and scientists in public health work to make this a better world for all beings.

We can create our future. We are meeting new challenges and making unanticipated changes that will define that future. I look forward to turning challenges into opportunities, working with our Board of Governors, the House of Delegates, CVMA staff, committee members, and lobbyists.

There is no term limit on vision. There is no vision that does not involve change. Focus on the future and more importantly on the journey.

My favorite poem, *Desiderata*, by Max Ehrmann (1872–1945), was given to me by my mom—the same mom who always had confidence in me and urged me to pursue my dreams. I hope you can view the world as Ehrmann did and see its beauty and troubles through wise, hopeful, and compassionate eyes: "and whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should."

I look forward to our journey together.

Dirk B. Yelinek, DVM