

## **Your Efforts in Springfield—and Scholarships—Make a Tremendous Difference in Students' Lives**

*“We have to be political creatures, as veterinarians and as people. We can’t sit back and let things happen.”*—Emily Wheeler Lankau, Illinois veterinary student who participated in Lobby Day

*“What is tucked into a manila envelope and wedged into a 6’x 6’ square will make an enormous difference in our lives.”* —Erin Long, Illinois veterinary student, speaking at the Awards and Scholarships Ceremony about receiving notification of a scholarship award

*“It is estimated that the average student debt for a veterinary school graduate now exceeds \$106,000.”* —Dr. Gregory Hammer, president of the American Veterinary Medical Association, testifying before Congress

By Herb Whiteley  
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Two days in April illustrate the way organized veterinary medicine and individual practitioners are providing real and immediate support to veterinary students.

On April 9 about half a dozen students—along with more than 20 practitioners—descended on Springfield as part of the ISVMA Lobby Day. After a brief orientation, they were set loose to speak with their elected representatives.

A topic on the top of everyone’s agenda was the Veterinary Loan Repayment Program Act. This bill, introduced by Rep. David Reis (R-Dist. 108) through the efforts of Dr. Ron Gill and ISVMA, seeks to increase the number of veterinarians practicing in certain areas of Illinois by providing educational loan repayment assistance grants. It is similar to legislation passed at the national level in 2003.

Five days later, on April 14, more than 120 Illinois veterinary students received nearly \$270,000 in awards and scholarships given through College funds.

What ties these two days together is the urgent need to assist our future professional colleagues with the financial burden of their education. Loan repayment through state grants to new graduates who agree to serve needy areas will provide welcome relief. Scholarship assistance from people like you is another vital avenue of support that makes a real difference in the lives of students.

Erin Long, valedictorian in the Class of 2008 and a scholarship recipient, spoke poignantly at the April 14 ceremony about the impact financial assistance has on students:

The difference that Awards and Scholarship money can make may equal the difference between a student taking the non-paid research experience with a mentor over the night job as a server at a local restaurant.

The boost that Awards and Scholarship money provides could mean that the chance to ride in the truck for the summer with the ambulatory vet won't be passed up for a higher paid summer job in landscaping.

Perhaps a fourth year student who has developed a real love for radiology won't be dissuaded by the \$25,000 salary that next year's internship and three years of residency will offer.

For me, it meant feeling free to choose the next career step that was most fulfilling and best aligned with my values and dreams, and less importantly something that would provide a wealth of income.

The bottom line is that the generosity of Awards and Scholarship donors ... enhances our veterinary education and our veterinary careers. You are laying the foundation that makes it possible for students to achieve their goals and follow their dreams.

In February of this year, Dr. Gregory Hammer, president of the American Veterinary Medical Association, testified before a subcommittee of the House Committee on Agriculture about the need to *implement* the National Veterinary Medical Service Act.

“One of the biggest obstacles standing in the way of students pursuing a career in food supply veterinary medicine is educational debt,” he explained. “It is estimated that **the average student debt for a veterinary school graduate now exceeds \$106,000**. That debt has increased by almost 35 percent since the National Veterinary Medical Service Act was signed into law in 2003.” [reference 1, emphasis added]

While we work for funding from state and federal sources, scholarship support will always have an immediate impact on students. Another speaker at our awards ceremony, Dr. Marvin Case, a 1959 graduate of the College, shared this about his experience in establishing a scholarship for a second-year student with an interest in pursuing a non-practice veterinary career.

For a number of years we had been contributing money to a scholarship at the Veterinary College. But we never thought it possible for us to have our own scholarship fund. We found the process much easier than we anticipated. ... Initially we did not need a lot of money to get started. With our annual gifts and [corporate] matching funds, our scholarship fund has grown as well as the scholarship award.

In closing, I'd like to thank the ISVMA members who made it their priority to represent the veterinary profession to state legislators and Aaron Lower, then-president of the Illinois Student Chapter of the American Veterinary Medical Association, who helped rally the student troops to the lobbying cause.

I'd like to thank the many ISVMA members who not only contribute to the organization's scholarship funds, but take up the cause to create a class endowment or individual fund as well.

Together, we can ease the financial stresses and ensure that the future of the veterinary profession truly can “achieve their goals and follow their dreams.”

1. [http://www.avma.org/press/testimonies/hammer\\_testimony\\_080207.asp](http://www.avma.org/press/testimonies/hammer_testimony_080207.asp)