



## CLINIC CHAMPIONS

# A Beautiful Ride

Dolores Stantorf, LVT, reflects on the rapid pace of progress, steadfast relationships, and memorable moments through her 50 years in veterinary medicine.

*VCA Eagle River Animal Hospital, Eagle River, Alaska*



**W**hen Dolores Stantorf, LVT, heard about the veterinary technology program at Cosumnes River College in Sacramento, California, she thought: *I can do 2 years. That's easy.*



Little did she know, she would be charting a path for the next 50 years of her life.

Stantorf, a licensed veterinary technician supervisor at VCA Eagle River Animal Hospital located outside of Anchorage, Alaska, celebrated her golden work anniversary in June.

"I've had so many friends that have patted me on the back and have been there for me when I needed them, because there are long, hard days," said Stantorf. "You have to give a lot of empathy to the clients and the animals, but you don't always take care of yourself. I've always had somebody there to say, 'You're going to make it.'"

From the days of manual blood pressure readings and lengthy anesthesia prep, Stantorf has seen a lot of progress over 5 decades, but the core of what keeps her passionate about the profession remains. She loves helping animals and making connections with clients. A self-proclaimed "big talker," Stantorf uses her communication skills to develop a deeper relationship with pet owners and offer personalized guidance.

"I try to take that extra step to get to know our clients a little bit more," she said. "So, No. 1 they enjoy talking to you and know that you're there to help them. No. 2, they're going to come back to the clinic because they



#### MAKING THE NEWS

A 1986 edition of the *Anchorage Daily News* features Dolores Stantorf volunteering at the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race.

were treated with kindness, even in a difficult situation."

After starting in California, Stantorf has spent the bulk of her professional life in Alaska, where she has seen everything from basic wellness visits to animals being flown in from the bush and special care appointments for mushing dogs. One of her career highlights includes 3 years volunteering at the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race in the mid-1980s. During this iconic race, sled dogs cover nearly 1000 miles of rough terrain and harsh winter conditions in Alaska. Veterinary medical professionals volunteer to test and provide medical care for the racing dogs at various checkpoints.

We spoke with Stantorf about the lessons learned from her career and her experience working at the Iditarod.

**TODAY'S VETERINARY NURSE: What do you think has been the biggest change you've seen over the past 5 decades?**

**DOLORES STANTORF:** Well, I think the biggest change is technology, because it's made our job less

## 2025 TODAY'S VETERINARY NURSE CLINIC CHAMPIONS

*Today's Veterinary Nurse* aims to shine a light on inspiring stories with its Clinic Champions series. Each issue, TVN will honor a veterinary nurse for their contributions in community service, scholarship, advocacy, or innovation. This series will highlight unsung heroes who make a lasting impact on their patients and community.

At the end of the year, 1 of the 4 honorees will be recognized as the Clinic Champion of the Year.



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complicated. We've got more ways to diagnose in a shorter period of time, so we can take care of these patients faster. But you also have the change in mindset for the clients. When I started out, they were just a pet and clients weren't going to spend a lot of money on them. But now they're not just a pet, they're a family member. People will do more for their pet than they used to; they'll spend a little bit more money or they'll try a new drug or they'll do physical therapy. Before, the mindset was: If they don't get better on their own, then that's it. Technology plays a huge role in it, because clients want answers, and they don't want to have to wait 3 or 4 weeks to get the blood work back (or even a couple of days). Seeing what technology has done, it's fantastic. Holy cow. We used to hand dip x-rays, and now we've got them up in seconds with digital radiography. What used to take half an hour is now 5 to 10 minutes.

**TVN: What is your advice on how to adapt to change?**

**STANTORF:** Be flexible. Just because you learn something in school does not mean that's the way it's done at another hospital. And just because they do it one way and you were taught another way does not mean it's wrong. Keep an open mind about it. People

come in and expect it to be the same way that they were taught. In veterinary medicine, we're learning new things all the time. There are always new drugs. I was taught you don't put anything opaque into a vessel. And yet, all of a sudden, we're using propofol. That was so hard for me to do the first couple of times. You have to learn to be flexible. Take that and put it in your toolbox.

**TVN: What is your advice for standing out in the clinic and making a positive impression on your team and clients?**

**STANTORF:** Be assertive. Put yourself out there when you see somebody needing help, don't just stand back and watch. Prove that you can be there to help them. Whether it's cleaning the kennel because everybody else is too busy, or assisting a technician for IV catheter placement or with x-rays. If a doctor needs somebody, you're right there, take that animal from them, find out what they need to do. Be proactive in what you want to do so that they can see that you do have the capabilities, that you have the desire, and that you want to be there for them. Because if you stand back, pretty soon they're not going to ask and you're not going to learn anything. You're going to get upset because they're not utilizing you, and that's because you're not jumping in.

**TVN: That can be hard for some people if it does not align with their personality.**

**STANTORF:** Well, especially if you're a new person coming into a hospital, you don't want to overstep your bounds or step on anyone's toes. But you still have to find out how to step up in some way, just so that people know that you are interested and that you do want to do this. Because if you're just going to stand there and hold up the wall, nobody's going to ask you to do anything. It's important that you show that you care about what you want to do and that you want to learn. Make sure you've got some magazines that are interesting to you to pick up new skills or new information. Make sure that you're going through your emails so that you can see anything new. Find places where you can go to get more education for it. If you've

got something on the wall that says there's a CE opportunity coming up, ask "Can I go to this?" The more that you do that, the more you've got other people asking you for their help, and that makes you feel good.



**GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY**

Stantorf celebrated 50 years of working as a veterinary technician in June; she started in California but has been at a clinic outside of Anchorage, Alaska, for more than 2 decades.

**TVN: What were some of the injuries you all had to treat during the Iditarod?**

**STANTORF:** The first year that I was out there, Susan Butcher's dog team ran into a moose. The moose killed a couple of her dogs and injured a lot of them. When she made it to Skwentna, we were able to get her dogs on a plane and get them out of there. She ended up dropping out of the race that year. That was the worst injury that I had ever seen. We've had a couple through the years, like a snow machine came through and didn't realize that there was a team and caused several injuries. But most of the problems are usually because the dogs are having some bloody diarrhea or other issues due to the stress of running. Or they sustain injuries going over the burn area (a large stretch of the race that had been ravaged by a forest fire)—it's a very rough area to go through, and so you end up with a lot of leg injuries or foot injuries.

**TVN: What was the most memorable moment from that experience?**

**STANTORF:** When I was out at White Mountain, a snowstorm came in—and I mean it *really* came in. All the power was out. When we fly in, we fly on little Super Cubs. It's not a big plane. The next day, I flew out with 2 doctors, and we ended up landing on the ice because we couldn't see to reach Nome. And the pilot says, "Well, we need to turn this plane around so that we're facing the wind." The 2 doctors and I got out of the plane, and he gave me the engine cover, and he says, "Let me see if I can't turn it around with the wind and a little bit in the engine." So we all backed up, and he gives the engine some power, and all of a sudden it's total silence. When he went to give it power, that flipped the plane up on its wing, tipped the plane, broke the wing tip off, and bent the prop. He comes over and goes, "Well, I'm not flying you out of here." We got the plane back on all of its wheels, and he called in for another plane to come in and get us. When the weather cleared up, we ended up with a little plane that the media had been using out of Safety. Well, Safety is the last checkpoint before they get to Nome, and so they flew us all into Safety, and then the guy says, "OK, I've only got room for 1 person in the plane to head back to Nome." And he said, "I need 2 people to go back on a snow machine." Well, I had never been on a snow machine before, so I said "OK, I'll go!" They took us to Nome on the snow machine, and it was the most beautiful ride. We were out on the ice along the Bering Sea in the winter time. We could see huge chunks of ice, and traveling around there was so gorgeous.

— By Andy Zunz **TVN**



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