

BUILT ON THE SHOULDERS OF VETERINARY GIANTS

Veterinary Leaders in Kansas City (Part Six of Six)

The Best Boss We Ever Had

BY: DR. STEVE JOSEPH, KCVMA HISTORIAN

We've come to the end of our six part series on veterinary leaders in Kansas City during the 19th and 20th Centuries. Although all of them were vastly different they shared a common thread. They were successful in private practice, academia, government, military and/or industry and veterinary associations. All were AVMA Presidents.

Our final feature focuses on Dr. Gerald L. Johnson. Following his death in March 1994, Dr. Amanda Donnelly, the KCVMA President at the time, wrote the following words in her regular letter to the Association:

"I don't ever remember seeing Dr. Johnson when he wasn't smiling and offering words of encouragement. Like so many other people, I have fond memories of Dr. Johnson and saw him as a source of inspiration both personally and professionally."

Dr. Johnson's enthusiasm for veterinary medicine, family, friends and life was always evident. Two memorable moments come to mind when I think of Dr. Johnson. The first was listening to him sing his AVMA Presidential acceptance speech. The second came two years later when he proudly paraded through the Boston convention hall in his Uncle Sam costume, his wife Judy in tow, as his term as AVMA President came to an end. You just never knew what Jerry would do next!

Dr. Johnson served the KCVMA as an officer for 25 years. His positions included President and Secretary – Treasurer. When he was AVMA President – Elect he asked my wife Linda and I if we would take his place with the KCVMA while he attended to other duties. We have never been more honored, but we knew his were big shoes to fill.

Dr. Johnson was a President of MVMA and the 1971 Missouri Veterinarian of the Year. Additionally, the American Association of Industrial Veterinarians (today the American Association of Corporate and Public Practice Veterinarians) named him their 1985 Veterinarian of the Year.

He retired from Miles Animal Health (today Bayer Animal Health) in August 1993 after 26 years but even then continued as President of the University of Missouri Alumni Association. This was another challenge he accepted with the same enthusiasm that dominated other areas of his life.

In 1992, Dr. Johnson spoke to veterinarians at the Central Veterinary Conference. During that speech he read one of his favorite quotes:

"Enthusiasm is the yeast that makes your hopes rise to the stars. Enthusiasm is the sparkle in your eyes, the swing in your gait, the grip of your hand, the irresistible surge of will and energy to execute your ideas."

He added that enthusiasm makes things happen. **"We can make things happen. We can make our veterinary associations better. If we spread enthusiasm we cannot fail."**

It was often said, he was "the Best Boss we ever had".

