

It's been a few weeks now since our hospital suffered the unexpected loss of Dr. Gale Jagels. I would like to dedicate this month's column to his memory and hope that in some way I can share with the Vallejo community what his 13 years of dedicated and compassionate hard work meant to our organization.

Probably the best way to express what Dr. Jagels meant to us as a person and a veterinarian is to share with you the eulogy I gave at the memorial service for him at Bethany Lutheran Church in Vacaville, Ca. September 24, 2006.

All of us knew Gale in a different way. For some he was a beloved family member, for many he was a close and dear friend, and for others he was an endearing and gentle co-worker.

I knew him as professional colleague; an employee and a peer at the same time. Gale worked with us for over 13 years. When I think back on how he affected our practice, I can't help but think first of his unwavering willingness to work a very non-traditional work week. Up until the past few months, Gale worked every weekend-the whole weekend-plus a day or two on each end. This unselfish commitment on his part allowed our practice to be open 7 days a week. A feature that even today is quite unusual for a general veterinary practice.

Though he may not have realized it, Gale changed Redwood in many ways during his tenure with us. For example, in surgery, by taking some simple but vital steps, Gale improved the sterile technique of some of our routine surgical procedures. He didn't press any of the other doctors to change what they were doing, rather he quietly set an example, and we all soon followed suite. Clearly, it was a better way to do things.

Gale was one of the first doctors at Redwood to take a focused look at how we controlled pain in our animal patients. His initial insight and literature research was the foundation for our current pain management program, of which we are very proud.

Gale developed a special interest in Behavioral medicine, an area of clinical practice that deals with behavioral problems in pets. This area of practice is quite challenging, but Gale approached it eagerly. Imagine for a moment, willingly taking on problems like an aggressive or destructive pet, an incessantly barking dog, or a cat that can't seem to find the litter pan any more. I never asked Gale why this area appealed to him. Maybe it was because he knew that behavioral problems in pets are the most common reason animals are relinquished to shelters. Or maybe it was that he saw families who deeply loved their pet, but had nowhere else to turn.

Purely through his actions, without speaking a word, Gale reminded all of the doctors and staff at Redwood that the practice of veterinary medicine goes way beyond diagnosing and treating a pet's medical problem. Gale taught us that our work is not complete until we help and support the pet's human family members as well. I remember countless times Gale would give of his own time to pick up a pet, or drop off a medication

at someone's house, he would often transfer critical pets to the emergency clinic on his way home, or simply stay and chat with someone longing for human contact.

Those were just a few of the things Gale shared with us as a veterinarian.

As a person Gale taught us about humor, sensitivity, dependability and the value of looking at the world, at least some times, as a collection of toys that were meant to warm the heart.

He continually reminded us to look for what is right in people rather than what is wrong; to look past the labor of a job, and make it fun; and to look at friends for how you can help them, rather than how they can help you.

And whether we realize it or not, he taught us that reserved humbleness, while not flashy or attention getting, is a powerful personality trait that builds true and enduring trust.

And so for me the last few days have been filled with striking irony.

It's ironic that we all gather here to focus our thoughts and feelings on one man-Gale Jagels; a man who felt noticeably uncomfortable with attention paid to him, let alone the spotlight.

It's ironic that today we experience emotions of deep regret and sadness for the passing of someone who was, quite frankly, famous for his lightheartedness and playful approach to life.

It's ironic that Gale taught us to measure our world by what is right, good and positive, yet today we feel that we have been profoundly wronged by his passing.

*And a final and most conspicuous irony:
I suspect that in Gale's absence, we will see more clearly his message.*

To quote from The Profit by Kahlil Gibran:

"When your friend parts from you, grieve not; for that which you love most in him may be more clear in his absence, as the mountain is more clear from the plain"

All of us at Redwood Veterinary Hospital will forever miss our friend and co-worker.