

Shaping a talented and diverse student body

GEORGIA

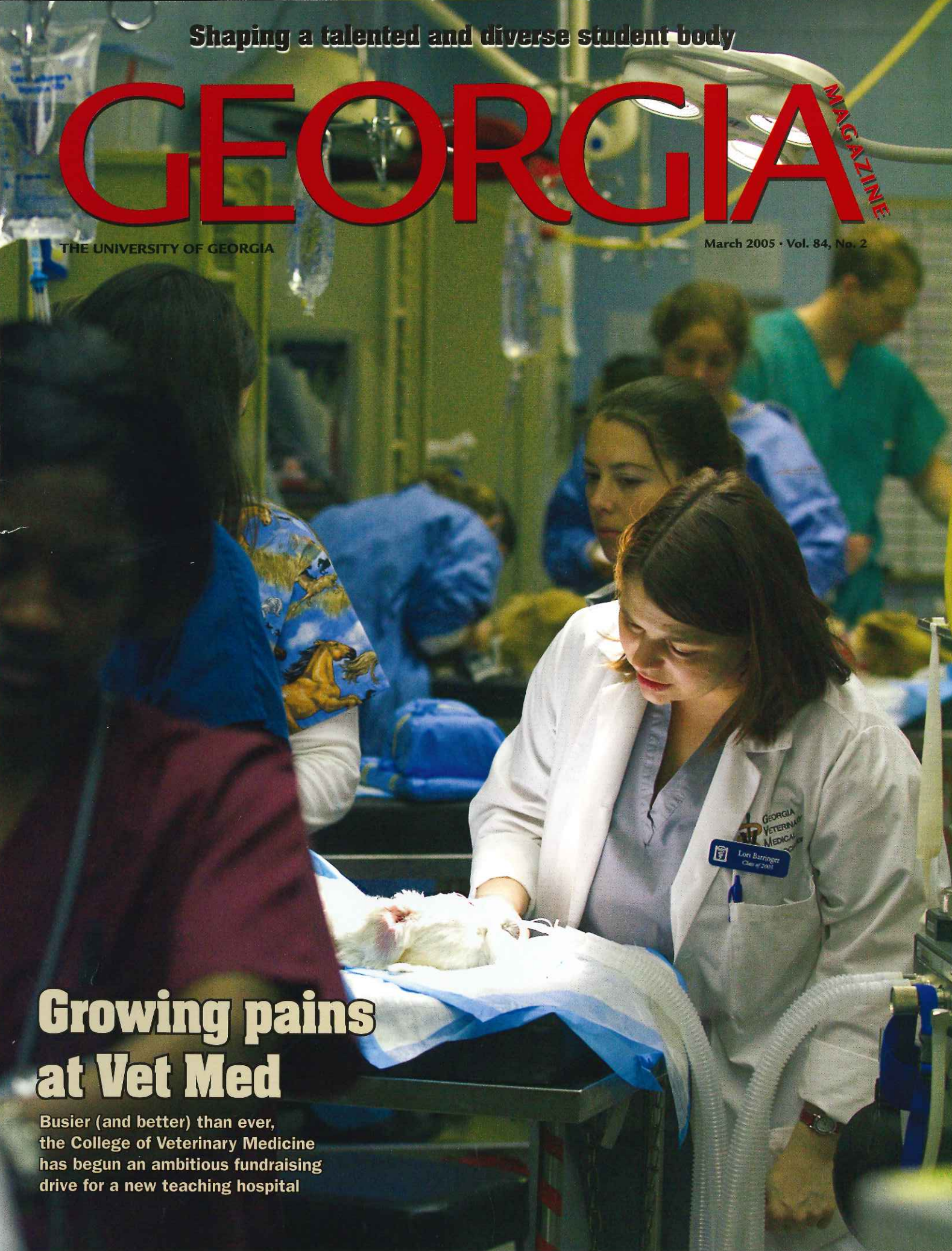
MAGAZINE

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Growing pains at Vet Med

Busier (and better) than ever, the College of Veterinary Medicine has begun an ambitious fundraising drive for a new teaching hospital



Small exam rooms, crowded surgical facilities, and an increasing number of patients have prompted UGA's College of Veterinary Medicine to embark on an ambitious fundraising campaign to build a new state-of-the-art teaching hospital

Growing pains at Vet Med

by Tracy Curlee (ABJ '90)

photos by Peter Frey (BFA '94)

Neurologist Marc Kent studies a series of scans on a computer screen, searching for an abnormality, anything that can explain why the small dog lying in the MRI machine is blind in one eye. The preliminary exam performed by ophthalmologist Clara Williams was inconclusive, suggesting an obstruction or a possible growth on the brain. It's up to Kent to find the exact source of the problem.

The scanning process takes an hour and a half, and this dog is the first of 10 MRI patients on today's schedule. There isn't enough space in the UGA's College of Veterinary Medicine for a separate MRI facility. So a private firm, Alliance Imaging, parks its mobile MRI truck at the hospital's loading dock.

The dog undergoing the MRI is one of 16,000 small animals that UGA's veterinary college will care for this year, and the large animal hospital will treat 3,000 more. The size of its annual caseload and the high level of care it dispenses are just two reasons why

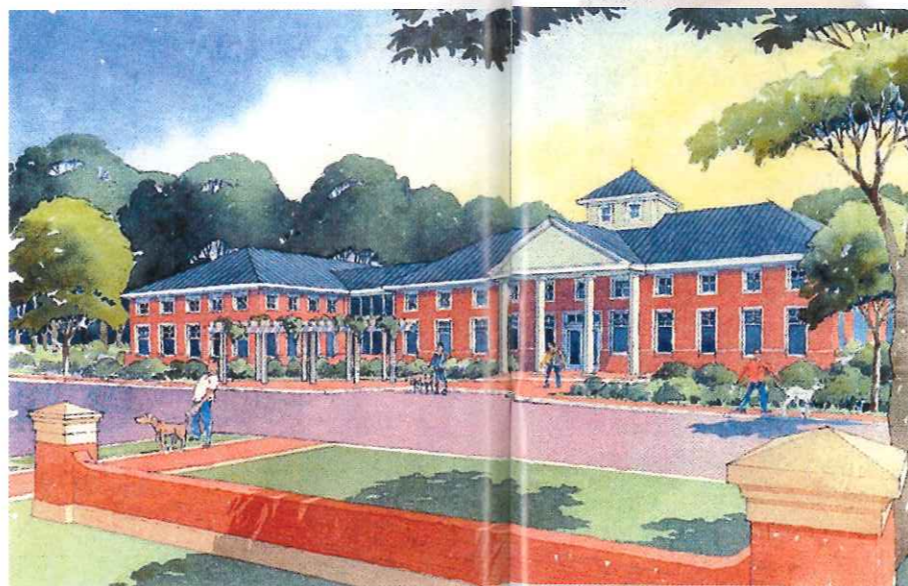
UGA's veterinary medicine program is consistently ranked among the top 10 in the country, according to *U.S. News & World Report*.

And with good reason. The faculty includes experts in diseases of poultry, caged birds, fish, wildlife, companion and food animals, and horses. The master's program in avian medicine is the first and best known of its kind. UGA is the only college that offers a certificate program in international veterinary medicine. And in the post-9/11 world, with bioterrorism a threat to humans, veterinary faculty like Corrie Brown, an internationally recognized expert on anthrax, are more valuable than ever.

If UGA's College of Veterinary Medicine wasn't an essential source of care for pet owners in Georgia and the Southeast, it wouldn't need an in-house MRI facility and larger examination rooms. If the college didn't have an obligation to increase student enrollment to address a national shortage of veterinarians, it wouldn't need more

faculty and more classrooms. And if it weren't doing groundbreaking research in both animal and human diseases, it wouldn't need more money for endowed chairs and professorships.

But it is doing all of that—and more. And to better serve its clients and constituents, UGA's College of Veterinary Medicine needs room to grow.



The working floor plan for the new teaching hospital—which might look something like the drawing at left—would have 246,000 square feet of space. Located at the eastern end of College Station Road, the new facility will likely cost \$60-\$70 million.



Clinicians supervise while interns take a skin biopsy from a horse in a large animal recovery stall.

On the drawing board is a new state-of-the-art teaching hospital (see preliminary drawing on p. 19) that will allow the college to maximize its teaching, research, and service objectives. Located near the eastern end of College Station Road on what is now pastureland, the new teaching hospital would encompass 246,000 square feet—nearly four times larger than vet med's current operational space on South Campus.

Price tag for the ambitious public-private fundraising campaign: \$60-\$70 million.

UGA's lack of space is emblematic of a national crisis that plagues both

veterinary colleges and the profession.

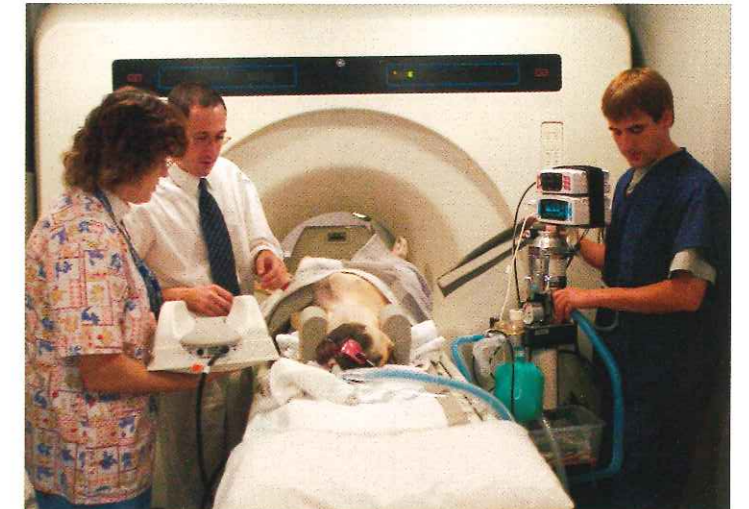
"Right now, there are three job offers for every graduate," says Doug Allen, acting associate dean for public service and outreach, as well as hospital director. "Based on population growth and the increasing need for specialized medicine—particularly since 9/11 and public health threats like anthrax and bioterrorism—by 2012 the U.S. will have more than 28,000 job openings for veterinarians. The current number entering the workforce from all U.S. colleges of veterinary medicine each year is about 2,300. Without substantial enrollment increases, the shortage of veterinarians will increase."

To address this problem, in the last eight years UGA has increased the number of new vet students admitted

each fall from 80 to 96—which maxes out an already cramped physical plant.

Many of the career paths experiencing shortages require post-DVM training. While 20-25 percent of graduates—the vast majority of whom are aiming for clinical specialties—seek advanced training, non-practice careers are grossly underserved. And with classroom space already bottlenecked, according to retiring dean Keith Prasse, meeting those needs is becoming increasingly difficult.

"When we entered the current hospital in 1979," says Prasse, "we had two staff employees per clinical faculty member. Now with 60 clinical faculty members, 96 fourth-year students, and a much greater caseload, we require three to five staff members per clinician."



(top left) Patients are transported by gurney from the pre-op room to the mobile MRI truck parked outside the hospital's loading dock.

(above) Dr. Marc Kent and his staff adapt the MRI beds designed for humans to fit animals.

(left) Dr. Anthony Moore conducts rounds with students in an impromptu conference area that also serves as an exam room.



When the college expanded from its original building in 1979, the program was only 29 years old, veterinary care in America was still relatively basic, and UGA's staff saw only 10,000 patients a year. There was ample room for what was then considered cutting-edge technology. But as research and development increased in human medicine, animal medicine changed dramatically, too. If a medical doctor could save a human cancer patient, pet owners reasoned, why couldn't the family veterinarian do the same for Rover?

"MRIs were unheard of 10 years ago, even in humans," says Kent. "But now pet owners are more educated about the technology that's available, and they're more willing to spend money to find out what's wrong with their pets."

Pet owners are also traveling greater distances for veterinary care—like Jane Hirsch, who spent six weeks commuting to Athens from Charleston, S.C., so her dog Rafter could receive radiation treatments for cancer (see sidebar on p. 22).

To maintain quality with existing vet med facilities, bathrooms have been

turned into exam rooms, closets into meeting rooms, hallways into classrooms—whatever's necessary to keep up with a caseload that includes just about every type of animal imaginable: dogs, cats, horses, cows, pigs, chickens, turtles, lizards, snakes, rabbits, ferrets, and birds of every feather. The staff sees so many exotic animals—everything from parrots to alligators—that there's an academic and clinical specialty devoted exclusively to them.

The large animal hospital also needs more elbow room.

"We need to improve and increase the number of isolation stalls, surgery stalls, and neo-natal stalls—of which we only have two," says Allen. "In the spring—when foals and calves are born to animals experiencing problem pregnancies—those two neo-natal stalls don't



JANE HIRSCH AND RAFTER
Jane Hirsch's dog was initially diagnosed with terminal cancer. When UGA's veterinary staff saved his life, she raised \$9,000 for research.

"TROT FOR THE CURE"

JANE HIRSCH AND RAFTER

Jane Hirsch of Mt. Pleasant, S.C., and her six-year-old Australian Shepherd Rafter have much to be thankful for. Rafter had been a certified therapy dog for only a year when his veterinarian referred him to UGA's College of Veterinary Medicine for a mysterious neck pain.

"There are no veterinarians in South Carolina who perform MRI's," says Hirsch, "so we were referred to UGA as one of the top choices."

Accustomed to cheering patients at children's hospitals and nursing homes, Rafter became the one who needed comforting. Diagnosed with osteosarcoma, an aggressive bone cancer, he was given only six to nine months to live—even with six weeks of intense radiation treatments.

"This type of cancer always comes back," says Hirsch, "so the doctors couldn't give me much hope."

But miraculously Rafter beat the odds. His cancer has been in remission for three years, and his latest checkup at UGA reveals continued bone growth.

Hirsch was so impressed with UGA's veterinary faculty and staff who saved Rafter's life that she decided to organize "Trot for the Cure," a fund-raising walk for dogs and their owners around Magnolia Gardens in Mt. Pleasant.

The event far exceeded Hirsch's expectations with almost 300 participants. She ran out of registration forms, food, and promotional t-shirts—which are going through another run at the screen printer because of continued demand. The nearly \$9,000 she raised will go to the Cancer Research, Education and Service for Pets Fund at UGA's College of Veterinary Medicine.

Hirsch says they're already planning next year's "Trot." And this time, she promises she won't run out of t-shirts!

For information on giving to UGA's College of Veterinary Medicine, visit: www.vet.uga.edu/giving.

Following surgery, Bird was taken to the farm of a hospital staff member for daily monitoring by faculty and veterinary residents. Three months later, he was brought back to the hospital to have a tubing system delivering medicine to his upper eye removed.

"If there were enough space for large animals to be housed on site," says Dietrich, "the students, not just faculty and residents, could monitor and learn from their recovery."

In 1997, Ed Mahaffey, retired associate dean for public service and outreach, conducted a survey on operational space at eight veterinary colleges, including five "peer institutions" (Illinois, N.C. State, Texas A&M, Florida, Michigan State) and three "aspirational institutions" (UC-Davis, Colorado State, Cornell). The average hospital space at those eight schools was 150,000 square feet—compared to 63,000 at UGA, which has a larger caseload than any comparable veterinary college in the U.S.

What a difference the new teaching hospital would make. The facility's large animal wing would include four surgery rooms, three exam rooms, a 98-stall barn, and a receiving area to handle the cattle and horse trailers that currently clog the old facility's parking lot. The small animal wing would be equipped with nine treatment suites, special suites for oncology and ophthalmology, six operating rooms, and 28 exam rooms, plus ICU and an anesthesia prep and isolation room. Two MRI/CT scan rooms would eliminate the need to hire the Allied Imaging truck. The plan also calls for a classroom and faculty offices.

Still in its early stages, the fundraising campaign is approaching \$1.7 million in private gifts.

"We're depending on our alumni

come close to fulfilling our needs."

Because of the volume of large animals seen by the college, there isn't sufficient room for the animals to complete their stay at the hospital. American show horse "Cool Night"—better known as Bird by his owners and handlers—came to UGA with a severely

infected cornea that required two surgeries to correct, the last of which was a corneal transplant. Fortunately, the college had acquired an equine cornea from an owner who donated his horse's organs to UGA, thus enabling ophthalmologist Ursula Dietrich to save Bird's eye and send him back to the show arena.



—who are now practicing veterinarians—and their client base," says vet med's director of development Kathy Bangle. "These are people who have an affection for animals and animal welfare. We're also reaching out to our own client base, which drives what we do as a teaching hospital."

"We would like to raise at least \$10 million on our own," says Prasse. "That would show the state that the University and the college have made a serious commitment toward the building."

Raising \$60-\$70 million is a considerable task. But with Uga—who gets all of his primary care at the college—lending his support to the fundraising campaign, the College of Veterinary Medicine hopes to break ground on its new facility in five years.

"Uga is our campaign spokesdog," says Bangle. "And you know Uga—he always backs a winner!" **GM**

For more information: www.vet.uga.edu.



(top) Only one exam room is available for small animal primary care. Under the direction of Dr. Kathy Kero and her staff, it provides essential clinical experience for fourth-year students and interns.

(middle) The college sees so many exotic animals that there's an entire specialty devoted to them.



(bottom) In a new state-of-the-art teaching hospital, traditional X-ray viewing boxes would be replaced by a computer system that could overlay CAT scans, MRI's and X-rays, making the diagnosis process quicker and more accurate.