

Oberschlake enjoys serving community

HORTONVILLE — For three decades, Dan Oberschlake has dedicated his days to helping animals, both big and small.

As the owner of Heritage Animal Hospital Ltd., which operates offices in Hortonville and Greenville, he's seen many changes in veterinary medicine. But he's never forgotten the basics.

"It's all based on trust," he said. "People have to trust you to take care of their animals."

This year, the practice is celebrating its 50th anniversary. Heritage Animal Hospital was founded by Keith Breyer in 1958. Breyer operated out of his home on Nye Street before building a house and clinic on the current site. He saw small animals, but did the bulk of his work on cows, horses and other farm animals. His wife, Marcy, ran the office.

"For several years, Dr. Breyer worked 18 hours a day, seven days a week," Oberschlake said. "Then he brought in Roger Meads and Robert Gay as partners."

Oberschlake graduated from Ohio State University School of Veterinary Medicine and then served an internship at the University of Minnesota Veterinary School. He had planned to teach, but changed his mind and joined Heritage Animal Hospital as a partner in 1978.

"They were visionary veterinarians," he said. "In the '70s and '80s, there wasn't any place to refer animals to like there is today. If it was going to get done, we were going to do it or the animal was going to die. If we were up against a difficult case or didn't have the facilities, we researched in books. It was a very educational experience."

In 1996, the practice split. New practices were formed to specialize in equine and dairy cattle medicine. Oberschlake took on the small animal practice. He now is the sole owner and works with five staff veterinarians. About 15 years ago, Heritage opened a clinic in Greenville.

"There's an equal amount of clients at both offices now," Oberschlake said.

With such longevity, Heritage Animal Hospital has had an influence on other practices in the Fox Valley.

"There are over 10 practices where there are vets who I taught in school, worked for me or who I wrote recommendations to veterinary school for," Oberschlake said. "It shows how over 50 years, one practice can influence a whole area."

One of the major differences in the practice is the shift from dairy to house pets.

"Back then cows were more important than dogs to an owner because they were a

source of livelihood," Oberschlake said. "Now it's evolved and dogs and cats are part of the family."

Ardella Weiland, Heritage's longest-serving employee, also has seen that change.

"The biggest thing is that the dairy farms disappeared from this area," she said. "And the doctors went to the animals, the animals didn't come to them."

Weiland, who has been with the practice for more than 40 years as the office manager, still works a few hours every week.

"I was born and raised on a farm and I always liked animals and still do," she said. "It was a good fit for me. We always practiced good quality medicine and the doctors cared about what they were doing."

That dedication continues today.

"There are so many more things we can do now for animals," Oberschlake said. "The procedures are safer, there's better pain management and we even clean teeth, which is a huge part of the practice."

As he sits in his personal office, which was Breyer's former bedroom, Oberschlake takes pride in the practice and its history.

"After 30 years, I still like coming to work," he said. "You're constantly learning. And I'm dealing with the third generation of clients. All of the people I know so well. I like to relive things with them and tell stories."

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