



OBITUARY

Dr. John R. Steele, DVM

By Kendra Peoples

On February 24, 2017, the equine world lost a legend; Dr. John R. Steele passed away at the age of 91. There are many words that could describe the kind of life Dr. Steele lived, but no one can deny that it was a full life. He was still working just a week before his death. Dr. Steele's long and illustrious career in sports horse medicine began when he graduated from Cornell University in 1946. The following year, at the age of twenty-two, Dr. Steele became the youngest assistant professor at Cornell. Dr. John Steele started his equine sports medicine career in the Standardbred world, an interest partly developed because of his father's love of the breed. Then, at the request of jumper greats John and Beezie Madden, he entered the jumper world. Dr. Steele's influence in the Morgan and American Saddlebred world goes back decades, as well.

Multiple Morgan and American Saddlebred World Champions have been treated by Dr. Steele. Mike Goebig was first introduced to Dr. Steele in 1974 when he was working at his farm in Coopersburg, Penn. Suzanne Venier, who would become Suzanne Steele two years later, was a customer of Mike's, and she recommended that Mike give Dr. Steele a call. As did many of his other clients, once Mike used Dr. Steele, he went back to him again and again over the years. He would eventually go on to help multiple World Champions in Mike's training program, such as Greentree Mary Jane who would go on to win two back-to-back world championships with Goebig as part of her record-setting career in the roadster to bike division. "Two years after seeing a horse, he could put his hand on that horse and recall exactly what he had done and prescribed," Mike recalled. "One of the other significant things about Dr. Steele was that he was such a hands-on vet. He was so experienced and really looked at the complete horse. He was also accessible. I'm not sure he ever knew he was busy," Mike laughed. "I think he thought that was normal life."

Lynn Peoples was first introduced to Dr. Steele in 1983. Lynn had mentioned that he was having issues with a promising four-year-old English pleasure horse to Suzanne, as well. She suggested that Lynn reach out to Dr. Steele. When they met at Dr. Steele's practice in Vernon, N.Y., Dr. Steele said that this treatment would take time and effort, but that it was possible. That four-year-old was Rapidan Hermes, and Lynn went on to take a victory pass at Oklahoma City each of the four times he showed him there, including winning the English Pleasure Four-Year-Old World Championship. Lynn had Dr. Steele then work on such notable horses as Trijas Mr. Pepperpot, Summerbird Orion, Summerbird Ms. Command, Born To Boogie, Man In Motion, and Arboria Victorious. "As far as I'm concerned, there will never be another John R. He could talk to you and make sure you understood him. He had a wealth of knowledge and experience, which made you trust him and believe that he could get it done. He surrounded himself with some great people who stayed there working with him for a long, long time. They complemented each other with the chiropractic care and so on," Lynn said.

Morgan and Saddlebred trainer, Peggy Alderman, has also been a long-time client and friend of Dr. Steele. They first met in 1986 when she moved to Vermont, and she has used him for her veterinary care for most of the last thirty years and completely for the last twenty. "Doc changed my life, and he changed how I look at horses," Peggy said. "I think I would be a way different horse trainer without him. The beauty about John Steele was that he taught you; he didn't just diagnose your horse. He wouldn't say 'this is what's wrong.' He'd ask, 'What are you seeing and feeling?' He would keep asking questions. Later on, I realized that he was teaching me how to figure it out on my own." Peggy's very own Nutorious was nicknamed "John" after Dr. Steele. "I figured he'd get extra special vet care," Peggy laughed. "Another amazing thing about Dr. Steele was that when I'd be heading off to a show, he'd be on the phone bugging me by 8am. There's a man with thousands of horses that he's monitoring who takes the time and effort to check in and ask how things were going. We had a horse with a quarter crack, and he hooked me up with Ian McKinley, the man who stitched the quarter crack on Big Brown. Wherever you went, Dr. Steele opened doors for you. He definitely changed my world."

Contributions in Dr. John Steele's memory can be made to the John R. Steele '46 Graduate Scholarship Fund established in his honor at Cornell University. This scholarship is designed for students who wish to pursue an education in equine medicine that have a farm background. The fund helps students who did not previously believe that a Cornell education was within their options. A celebration of life is planned for Monday, March 13 at the Patio at Polo in the Polo Club, 11198 Polo Club Road, Wellington, Fla.

