

## Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine

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### Staff member Dionne Henderson's legacy of kindness and inclusion inspires new award

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The Henderson family with the three award winners.

A crowd of faculty, staff and friends celebrated the winners of the inaugural Dionne Henderson Staff Excellence Award in a heartfelt ceremony at the College of Veterinary Medicine September 24.

The award's namesake, Dionne Henderson, worked with the college for nearly a decade in administrative positions for both Human Resources and the Department of Clinical Sciences. She passed away unexpectedly in 2016 after complications from a cancer-related surgery. "Dionne was a unique person and an invaluable source of positive energy and enthusiasm, infinite kindness, warmth and knowledge," said Mary Beth Jordan, director of human resources at the college. "We are so grateful to have had her as part of the college community."

The award was presented to three winners during the celebration: Scott Butler, Cindy DeCloux and Sue Williams. Scott Butler is a research support specialist and the former chair of the CVM Staff Council. Jordan described him as

the “brainpower” behind the college’s ambassador program, which welcomes newly-hired staff and helps them succeed in their new roles.

Cindy DeCloux is an instructional technologist with Educational Support Services, whom Jordan praised for her efforts to lead and implement wellness initiatives like CSA shares and exercise programs, and help them evolve across the college. Wellness is a key part of the college’s [strategic plan for 2018-2022](#).

Sue Williams is front office manager for the Baker Institute for Animal Health. Jordan said of Williams, “She creates such a warm, welcoming environment for Baker staff, faculty, students and each visitor who walks through the front door – even the HR Director!”

Lorin Warnick, D.V.M., Ph.D. ’94, the Austin O. Hooey Dean of Veterinary Medicine, congratulated the winners and presented them with their award letters. “They embody the same core values that Dionne Henderson had, and those of the college itself: excellence, collaboration, compassion, stewardship, innovation, respect and communication,” said Warnick.

“Creating an environment of inclusion and empathy for all is something Dionne did naturally,” said Carol Merkur, director of business operations with the Department of Clinical Sciences. “She was kind to everyone. Her contagious smile, her positive attitude and her innate ability to find something good in everything and everyone made her a unique individual.”

At the luncheon, the college community was joined by Henderson’s husband Bryan, her daughters Mariah and Brionna, her parents and family friends. Jordan welcomed them and shared her own memories of Henderson, recalling how, the evening before Henderson’s initial interview, she happened to be working in the office late. “I heard the pitter-patter of little feet coming down the hall – and there was Dionne with her young daughters in tow, making sure she knew exactly where to go in the morning.” Jordan teared up during her remarks. “It gives us great joy to honor Dionne’s memory here today,” she said.

The “In Strong Hands” Staff Award was created by Dean Donald Smith in 2001 to recognize the contributions of staff members at the college. In 2018, Warnick and Jordan charged the CVM Staff Council with reviving this award, which they renamed in Henderson’s honor and opened to the community for nominations this summer. The award will be given annually to non-academic staff who consistently demonstrate a high level of commitment to the college and its community members.


“They not only excel at their jobs, but also have a positive and influential impact on the college environment and foster cooperation and collaboration among colleagues,” said Warnick.

The CVM Staff Council is creating a new plaque for the award, which will be updated annually with the names of the winners and displayed prominently at the college. Both Warnick and Jordan thanked the council – which collected, reviewed and chose the award winners – for their work.

“Their efforts have resulted in something special, something that recognizes the importance of collaboration across the college and the value of doing one’s work with kindness and enthusiasm,” said Warnick.

By Melanie Greaver Cordova

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Dean Warnick and director of human resources Mary Beth Jordan welcome Henderson family members to the event.

Jordan presents H



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