

# Zweig

From the Harry M. Zweig  
Memorial Fund for Equine  
Research at the Cornell University  
College of Veterinary Medicine



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## Minnie to the Max! CVM's Beloved Mini Horse is a Big Red Star

By Beth Saulnier

Saved by Cornell veterinarians, the wee critter has become a campus celebrity — and an equine ‘nurse’ to nervous patients.

Among the many dignitaries at the 2017 inauguration of President Martha Pollack was an unofficial ambassador from one of Cornell's colleges. Though petite in stature and unassuming by nature, this quiet charmer couldn't help drawing the eye, sparking wonder and inspiring smiles from everyone she met.

Her official name: Cinnamon Sprinkle. But in honor of her effervescent personality, she's known as Cinnamon *Sparkle*. Most people just call her Minnie.

And she is, indeed, mini: a miniature horse, standing about 28 inches at the withers and weighing some 220 pounds.

Beloved by all, 21-year-old Minnie is a resident animal at the College of Veterinary Medicine's Equine Hospital, where she has spent the past decade comforting patients in need of calming and companionship.

But she has also become the college's tiniest and most adorable ambassador — gracing its holiday cards, appearing at events like Homecoming and the annual CVM Open House, and effortlessly improving the mood of anyone fortunate enough to pet her silky mane.

“She exemplifies how much joy animals bring to our lives,” says Sarah Bassman, former marketing and communications assistant at the Cornell University Hospital for Animals whose affinity for

horses in general, and Minnie in particular, made her the wee celebrity's chief handler and press rep.

“You can't look at her and not feel love and happiness. And that's why we're here — for animal wellbeing and human wellbeing.”

On a balmy day in late October, Bassman takes Minnie for a jaunt around campus for a photo shoot, leading her with a rope and halter.

Asked who's in charge when they commute by foot and hoof, Bassman replies: “It's a negotiation.”

And yes, it's slow going — both because Minnie is always eager to dine on grass, and because people constantly want to pet her, take a selfie, or ask questions. (Usually, all three.)

**“She exemplifies how much joy animals bring to our lives.”**

— Sarah Bassman, Minnie's wrangler and beautician



Right: Strolling with Bassman outside the Equine Hospital.

## *Minnie to the Max continued*



*Kisses from a four-legged friend, a Guiding Eyes puppy in training.*

As befits a star, Minnie is blinged out for the occasion in Big Red style: her hooves have been painted with glitter polish, and her mane and tail sport ribbons that Bassman has expertly plaited.

The many students, faculty, and staff who admire her as she ambles from CVM to the Arts Quad and back are even rewarded with a collector's item: an oval sticker emblazoned with her photo and "I met Minnie."

Among the tiny horse's biggest fans is CALS alum Ariana Harris '05.

A longtime licensed veterinary technician (LVT) on the Hill, she serves as Minnie's daily caretaker — making sure she gets regular vaccinations, hoof trims, and the like.

"She's very outgoing and friendly," Harris observes. "She likes to be the center of attention. Some horses are a bit more shy and not as personable. But whenever you walk into the barn, she's vocal — and will whinny to you if her lunch is late."

Minnie's sunny disposition and idyllic life at CVM stand in stark contrast to her tragic backstory.

She came to the Equine Hospital in 2012 during a life-threatening emergency: her baby had died during foaling and was stuck partially inside her.

Veterinarians were able to remove the foal's remains, but Minnie developed complications and needed extensive care.

"We were worried she would not make it, because of how sick she became," recalls LVT Kalli Anderson-Dyer. "She was in very rough shape."

Her owners ultimately donated her to CVM to be a buddy for the hospital's blood donor, Mike, a Belgian draft horse who was thought to be in need of company. (He has since passed away.)

Not only did they become fast friends who spent their days in the same enclosure, but they were outsized twins: the tiny horse was Mike's "mini me" — hence the nickname.

“She’s very outgoing and friendly,” Harris observes. “She likes to be the center of attention. Some horses are a bit more shy and not as personable. But whenever you walk into the barn, she’s vocal — and will whinny to you if her lunch is late.”

— Ariana Harris '05, Cornell LVT



Captivating hearts in the CVM atrium.



With Mike, her pal and doppelgänger. (Provided)

These days, in middle age, Minnie’s main health challenge is keeping the pounds off; as her caretakers joke, she can “gain weight on air.”

Her hay is pre-soaked to reduce the sugars, and she gets turned out in a dry (grass free) paddock to keep munching to a minimum.

Her favorite treat, which Bassman has been known to use as a bribe: peppermints.

Minnie’s many appearances on campus and beyond include field days on the Ag Quad, a Giving Day video with a CUPD canine, and CVM’s annual Concert for the Animals.

She even once facilitated a “prom-posal,” when she carried a sign for a student querying (as Bassman paraphrases): “Will you go to the dance with me? Yea or neigh?”

But as crowd pleasing as Minnie’s public appearances are, her primary job remains more vital: serving as a source of comfort for fellow horses in the hospital.

Anderson-Dyer can cite myriad examples of Minnie’s remarkable barn-side manner, including times when she has helped lead blind or visually impaired animals into their stalls or onto trailers.

Then there was another patient who was suffering from colic. He had never been off his farm before, and — being a herd animal — was upset that there were no other horses in the ICU at the time.

“We brought Minnie in and placed her in the stall across from him — but it didn’t help, because he couldn’t see her, since she’s short,” Anderson-Dyer recalls.

“So we set up one of our alpaca corrals in front of his stall, and he would nap right in front of her. He calmed down a lot, just because of Minnie being visible.”

*All photos and video (unless otherwise noted) by Noël Heaney/Cornell University.*

*Article adapted from Cornellians magazine, published November 30, 2022*

# Q&A series: Meet our new equine faculty

## Dr. Santiago Mejia, Cornell Ruffian Equine Specialists

The Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM) has recently welcomed many new faculty members to our academic departments and hospitals, each one bringing a unique set of skills and experience that enriches our college every day. In this Q&A series, you'll get to know their interests, expertise and more.

### **Q What has been your academic/career path leading up to Cornell?**

After completing veterinary training in my country Colombia, I did three internships prior to my surgical residency. My first internship was a 1-year surgical internship at Hagyard Equine Medical Institute in Lexington, Kentucky, thereafter I did a rotating internship at North Carolina State University and a third rotating internship at Cornell Ruffian Equine Specialist (CRES). Then I underwent surgical training at Cornell University Hospital for Animals. Soon after I finished my residency I stayed with Cornell and joined the CRES team as a surgeon.

### **Q What drew you to Cornell?**

I was always inspired by the Cornell tradition of excellence, research and innovation in a multitude of fields of veterinary medicine, especially in the field of large animal surgery.

### **Q What is your clinical area of expertise?**

I have special interest for Orthobiologics, soft tissue, minimally invasive and upper airway surgery.

### **Q What drew you into this area?**

I had the privilege to work with great mentors in my career that have taught me different skills, and valuable experiences, not only in the professional setting but also in my personal life. However, having the honor to learn and be mentored by Dr.

Norm Ducharme, Dr. Jon Pigott, Dr. Lisa Fortier, Dr. Susan L. Fubini and Dr. Heidi Reesink just to name a few in my career, they set up an example and a platform of what I wanted to achieve and what type of clinician I wanted to be.

### **Q What past professional work are you most proud of and why?**

There are too many professional experiences that motivate me on a daily basis to continue to provide care and service for our animals. But generally speaking, there is a great sense of joy and reward when we are able to help an animal and improve their outcome. Being able to make a difference for a patient and owner is the best pay we can receive.

### **Q What about your clinical work are you most excited for/proud of and why?**

I like clinical and applicable research that can provide the tools and knowledge to practitioners to find solutions to a problem or to help them better understand a situation, so they can provide the best care possible.

### **Q What impacts or applications do you hope to see your work have on animal health?**

Improve quality of life, performance and outcomes in horse, that make a difference not only for them but for the owners.



## Zweig Memorial Trot Saturday, July 8, 2023

**Q What clinical areas do you plan to explore next?**

I will focus on minimally invasive surgery approaches to different surgical procedures, that will decrease healing time and accelerate a return to function. Another area of interest is the use of orthobiologics to decrease or stop degenerative joint disease in horses.

**Q What's something most people don't know about you?**

I wanted to be an actor when I was younger but was too shy for it.

**Q What's the best part of being a clinician/scientist?**

Being able to contribute in some manner to the growth and knowledge in our profession.

**Q What's the most challenging part?**

Not being able to help/solve every horse's condition.

**Q What are the benefits of working at CVM? At Cornell?**

The people and the sense of community. The fact that people's ego is put to the side and everyone tries to help everyone in the best way they can to provide excellent care to our animals is by far the most rewarding thing. We all learn from each other.



*Photos: Provided*

# Remembering Dr. Alan Nixon



*Dr. Alan Nixon. Photo: CVM/Cornell University*

**Dr. Alan Nixon**, a world-renowned orthopedic surgeon and long-serving faculty member at the College of Veterinary Medicine, passed away on Wednesday, March 1, 2023, after a valiant battle with cancer.

Nixon was a pioneer in equine surgery, particularly novel orthopedic procedures and the repair of articular cartilage. He received his bachelor's degree in veterinary science in 1979 at the University of Sydney, Australia, and moved to Colorado State University for a residency in large animal surgery. After five years on faculty with the University of Florida, Nixon joined the faculty at Cornell in 1988. As a professor of large animal surgery he served in many roles over the years, including as the director of the Comparative Orthopedics Laboratory and the first chief medical officer of Cornell Ruffian Equine Specialists.

Nixon was a prolific researcher, with approximately 200 peer-reviewed papers since 1980, and many of his projects supported by the Zweig Memorial Fund. He was a diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and belonged to multiple national and international societies. He studied the basic

mechanisms of orthopedic disease and developed innovative, targeted gene therapy and regenerative medicine therapies for humans and horses alike. In 2009, he was inducted into the Equine Research Hall of Fame for his exceptional contributions to the field. He also earned the Neer Award for Research Excellence for his study of rotator cuff fixation techniques, the ACVS Founders Award—given to a veterinary surgeon with transformative impact on the profession, and the BEVA Richard Hartley award—awarded to the year's best paper published in the *Equine Veterinary Journal*.

In retirement, Nixon remained active in the profession as an emeritus professor at Cornell, courtesy faculty at the University of Florida, surgeon and consultant around the world. Dr. Susan Fubini, Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, shared that "Alan was not only a phenomenal surgeon — he was also a beloved husband, loyal friend and devoted father. His impact on the training of our surgical residents, veterinary students and equine patients, over the years, is profound."

# Harry M. Zweig Memorial Fund for Equine Research Awards

## New

\$28,203 to **Douglas Antczak** for “A Rosetta Stone for Equine Immune System Genotyping”

\$94,092 to **Joaquin Araos** for “Cardiopulmonary Effects of a Novel Mechanical Ventilation Method in Anesthetized Horses”

\$71,387 to **Marta Cercone** for “Evaluation of the Celiac Plexus Block in Treating Paralytic Ileus”

\$77,088 to **Mariana Diel de Amorim** for “Investigation of Interleukin 1 Beta (IL1B) Role in Equine Early Pregnancy”

\$64,887 to **Julia Felipe** for “Cytotoxic Immune Competence in the Equine Neonate and Foal”

\$74,674 to **Gerlinde Van de Walle** for “Equine Gastric Organoids to Study the Role of Equine Gammaherpesviruses in Equine Gastric Ulcer Syndrome (EGUS)”

\$90,000 to **Bettina Wagner** for “Protecting Horses Better Against Equine Herpesvirus Type 1”

## Continued

\$61,584 to **Douglas Antczak** for “Factors Affecting Durability in Standardbred Racehorses”

\$55,030 to **Heidi Reesink** for “Equine Joint Sepsis and Synovial Fluid Mucins”

\$57,914 to **Bettina Wagner** for “Inflammatory Biomarkers for Prediction of Breakdown Injuries in Horses”

## 2023 Harry M. Zweig Memorial Fund Committee Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine

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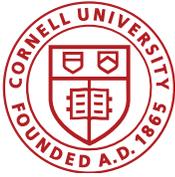
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*The Harry M. Zweig Memorial Fund  
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The Harry M. Zweig Memorial Fund for Equine Research honors the late Dr. Harry M. Zweig, a distinguished veterinarian, and his numerous contributions to the state's equine industry. In 1979, by amendment to the pari-mutuel revenue laws, the New York State Legislature created the fund to promote equine research at the College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University. The Harry M. Zweig Committee is established for the purpose of administering the fund and is composed of individuals in specified state agencies and equine industry positions and others who represent equine breeders, owners, trainers and veterinarians.

Visit us online  
[bit.ly/ZweigFund](http://bit.ly/ZweigFund)

Our site provides information on the projects and publications resulting from the Zweig Memorial Fund, and demonstrates the objectives of the Fund in promoting equine health in the racing industry. The Zweig News Capsule is published twice a year, and can be downloaded at [bit.ly/ZweigNews](http://bit.ly/ZweigNews). Please encourage other equine enthusiasts to visit the site.

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