

Black History Month Recognizes Prominent African American Veterinarians

By *Jasmine Streeter, DVM*
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News

In honor of Black History month, I will recognize the contributions of African American veterinarians. These individuals paved the way for veterinarians of color like myself. Without their commitment to the field and endurance in the face of adversity, many people of color would not be able to live out their dream practicing veterinary medicine.

More than 70 percent of African American veterinarians in the United States graduated from Tuskegee University School of Veterinary Medicine in Tuskegee, Alabama.

Established in 1945 by Dr. Frederick D. Patterson, Tuskegee remains the only historically Black college campus with a veterinary medicine program.

Dr. Frederick D. Patterson

Dr. Patterson is one of the most influential Black veterinarians in United States history. He earned his Doctorate



PHOTO COURTESY OF TUSKEGEE UNIVERSITY

Dr. Frederick D. Patterson, 3rd President of Tuskegee Institute, founder of Tuskegee University School of Veterinary Medicine and the United Negro College Fund

of Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M.) from Iowa State University and Doctorate of Philosophy from Cornell University.

“ [Dr. Patterson] coined the phrase ‘A mind is a terrible thing to waste’

He became the third president of Tuskegee Institute in 1935 and es-



Dr. Streeter and her dog Sheba

tablished the United Negro College Fund in 1944. He coined the phrase “A mind is a terrible thing to waste”.

In 1987, he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Dr. Michael Blackwell

Other notable veterinarians include Dr. Michael Blackwell, Tuskegee University graduate with a D.V.M in 1975. He attained the rank of Assistant Surgeon General of the Public Health Service in 2000.

Dr. Ruby Perry

Phenomenal women like Dr. Ruby Perry, a graduate of Tuskegee University, made history as the first Black female board-certified veteri-

nary radiologist. She is currently the Dean of Tuskegee College of Veterinary Medicine and one the greatest teachers I ever had in veterinary school.

Dr. Debbye Turner

Another great, Dr. Debbye Turner, showed that beauty and brains do exist. Dr. Turner was crowned Miss America in 1990 and graduated from the University of Missouri-Columbia with a D.V.M. in 1991.

This past January, I made history as the first African American to become president of the Oregon Branch of the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science.

In the Media

Veterinarians of color are also taking media and business by storm. “The Vet Life” TV series on Animal Planet made history as the first docu-series in 2016 following the lives of African American veterinarians: Dr. Diarra Blue, Dr. Aubrey Ross and Dr. Michael Lavigne. They live in Houston, Texas and opened Cy-Fair Animal Hospital to educate the public on the importance of preventive medicine while providing the best care to their patients. Each earned his doctorate of veterinary medicine from Tuskegee University.

Inventor

Dr. Joe J. Owens, III, an inventor and veterinary graduate from Tuskegee in 2012, recently creat-

ed Enjoy-A-Bowl, a bowl that uses human food to encourage picky pets to eat their food. Dr. Owens helps to create happy, healthy pets.

Overall, people of color are making leaps and bounds in the veterinary field, but we still have a long way to go. According to Data USA, in 2015, there were almost 67,000 practicing veterinarians in the United States. Approximately 1.7 percent of veterinarians were African American, indicating a severe shortage in diversity.

My hope is that in the coming years through education and exposure, more African Americans will enter the wonderful profession of veterinary medicine.

Ask Dr. Jasmine your pet question at drjasmine@theskanner.com.

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