

## Deborah Cottrell Twice-Named Veterinarian of the Year

**Veterinarian Deborah Cottrell's rescue work inspires two awards.**

*By Rachael Brugger*

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Photo Courtesy of Iaon Cottrell

Dr. Cottrell was twice-named Veterinarian of the Year.

As a bat lover, guinea pig rescuer, and medical provider for ferrets, Deborah Cottrell, DVM, of West End Animal Hospital has done more than befriend small animals. She has made waves throughout her community in Alachua County, Florida, and throughout the nation with her passion for the animals she cares for fueling her proactive community involvement.

This year, Cottrell was twice named Veterinarian of the Year, once by the Florida Veterinary Medical Association and also by No More Homeless Pets, a rescue organization. The awards already adorn her office wall as a testament to the unlikely convergence of veterinary medicine and altruism.

"Rescue groups and veterinarians have historically not always agreed on a lot of things," Cottrell said. "I hope that I'm able to set an example that rescue groups and veterinarians can work together very effectively."

Cottrell's clinic houses its own rescue, Helping Hands Rescue, which takes in all animals, including ferrets, gerbils, rats and guinea pigs. The clinic also spays and neuters rescued guinea pigs at a low cost.

Over the years, her clinic has also been involved in the welfare of small animals through collaboration with the Gainesville Guinea Pigs rescue, which has since closed, and by housing the Gainesville Ferret Rescue. Although Cottrell's clinic still provides medical care for ferrets, the ferret rescue itself has closed and the small animals now live with foster parents.

Joan McKinney, DVM, of the Micanopy Animal Hospital nominated Cottrell for the association's award. McKinney said Cottrell deserved to be named vet of the year because she has been an active member of the FVMA for more than 10 years and demonstrated unselfish and dedicated service to her work with ferrets, small animals and bats.

"Her many accomplishments, activities, and unselfish efforts have helped make major advancements in veterinary medicine and the status of her profession," McKinney said in an article for the FVMA's news magazine.

The award organizations recognized that Cottrell's rescue work transcended her typical clinical duties and inspired a new approach to veterinary medicine and rescue in her Florida community.

"Until I started doing it about 10 years ago, animal hospitals did not advertise that they did rescue," she said. "There was always a fear that people would dump huge numbers of animals on them. So they worked on a very small scale, very quietly."

As soon as she started posting adoption signs in her office, she noticed other animal hospitals following suit.

This sort of out-of-the-box thinking inspired the creation of the No More Homeless Pets award. Cottrell became the first-ever recipient of the award because of her dedicated involvement in providing medical care for rescued animals and the founding of Operation Pitnip, a project that has spayed and neutered more than 700 pit bulls during the hurricane Katrina relief.

"While the profession boasts many altruistic individuals who give back to their communities in many ways, the No More Homeless Pets award is given only to those who devote extraordinary efforts to develop creative and effective methods to improve the welfare of animals in our community," said Julie Levy, DVM and president of No More Homeless Pets, who nominated Cottrell.

The two awards, however, have not given Cottrell an excuse to bask in the glory and coast along as a highly revered



veterinarian. In an effort to continue to improve the face of her profession, she said that her office is currently upgrading to state-of-the-art X-ray and lab equipment and is searching for a more aggressive, unconventional approach to finding homes for small animals and other pets.

As for her advice for other aspiring and inspiring veterinarians, she urges them to get involved in their communities.

"Make a difference. Don't be so busy making money that you don't have time to do anything else," she said. "Really do something."