

Cat Health Expert Dies

James R. Richards, DVM, died after a motor vehicle accident.

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Dr. James Richards epitomized the idea of veterinarians as “gentle doctors.” (Photo courtesy of Cornell University) James R. Richards, DVM, director of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine and a national voice on cat health and care issues, died April 24 from injuries sustained in a motorcycle accident two days earlier. He was 58.

An American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) former president, Dr. Richards led the Vaccine-Associated Feline Sarcoma Task Force in the 1990s, an effort that created prevention and treatment recommendations for veterinarians and cat owners.

Richards wrote the ASPCA Complete Guide to Cats, served as consulting editor and co-author for The Cornell Book of Cats, and was editor-in-chief and columnist for “CatWatch,” a newsletter published by the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

He was a frequent media guest on various news programs and often lent his voice and energies to public awareness campaigns. Most recently, he was a spokesperson for the “Know Heartworms” campaign developed to address feline heartworm disease developed by the AAFP and the American Heartworm Society.

Born July 19, 1948, Richards received his veterinary degree from Ohio State University in 1979. He joined the Cornell veterinary college in 1991 as assistant director of the Feline Health Center, becoming director in 1997. Richards also served as an advisor to Alley Cat Allies, the trap-neuter-return program to manage feral cat populations.

The accident occurred at about 3:45 p.m. Sunday afternoon in Willet, N.Y., as Richards attempted to evade hitting a stray cat, the Ithaca Journal reported.

He is survived by his wife, Anita Fox Richards of Dryden, N.Y., sons Jesse and Seth, and his mother, Marion Richards.

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m., Saturday, April 28, at the Bethel Grove Bible Church, 1763 Slaterville Road, Ithaca, N.Y.

Memorials in his name can be made to the Cornell Feline Health Center, College of Veterinary Medicine, Ithaca, NY 14853.