

MIZZOU

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Alumni Profile

Extraordinary veterinarian

When Leon Russell was a boy, his dog contracted rabies. Russell, BS '53, DVM '56, was exposed and had to undergo the Pasteur treatment — 21 injections of a killed rabies virus vaccine into his abdomen. That incident led to his lifelong drive to study animals and prevent diseases that spread from them to humans. Russell is now a professor at Texas A&M University in College Station where he teaches toxicology, epidemiology and zoonoses.

His research has focused on controlling rabies. Russell worked on field trials of new rabies vaccines to help protect veterinary students and new vaccines to control rabies in domestic animals. He also helped develop and evaluate the effectiveness of a bait system used to deliver oral rabies vaccines to coyotes and gray foxes in rabies-affected areas of southern Texas. Russell and his team used dog biscuits and tested the baits on captive coyotes. After gaining the U.S. Department of Agriculture's approval, the Texas Department of Health started an oral rabies vaccination program, distributing the baited vaccinations by airplane. The program has nearly eliminated rabies in coyotes and foxes in southern Texas.

Russell was president of the American Veterinary Medical Association from 1993 to 1994 and was the first and only American president of the World Veterinary Association when he served from 2003 to 2005. It is the world's oldest international veterinary organization with nearly 100 member countries.

Russell spoke at MU's May 2010 honors convocation, at which he received an honorary doctorate of science. The news of receiving the honorary degree brought tears to his eyes. "I cannot express in words such a honor," Russell says. "Getting an honorary degree had never



Veterinary researcher Leon Russell, BS '53, DVM '56, shown here with wife Martha Mermoud Russell, BS Ed '53, received an honorary doctorate of science from MU in May 2010.

crossed my mind; I'm just so awed by it." — Josh Chittum

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Published by MIZZOU magazine, 109 Reynolds Alumni Center, Columbia, MO 65211 | Phone: 573-882-5916
| E-mail: Mizzou@missouri.edu

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