



Ernest "Ernie" Zirkle, DVM
1936-2021
Veterinarian, Sharer, Educator Farmer at
Heart

Dear Friend,

With some people you may only cross their path from time to time but they really make a lasting impression. Ernie was one of those people. He was always both helpful and pragmatic, which is often true of farmers' children. He spoke frankly, softly, and kindly even if he disagreed. He was very even and gentlemanly in his demeanor. Being with him was always comfortable; he truly had a special warmth. His words were measured and practical, his voice was deep, and he clearly conveyed the messages he wanted to deliver.

He was always teaching and sharing. For example when we spoke he would tell me about incidents of rabies being on the upswing and advise, "Get your dogs a booster every year." He shared information on feral cats and their plight, helping CU Maurice River to adopt positions on TNR. He often commented, "Keeping cats outdoors is actually cruel. They are exposed to elements and diseases more than people know and they live a terrible life. And because of rabies they present real threats."

It wasn't always serious things we discussed. He made the best pulled pork and I asked him about why his was so delicious. He described in detail the secret: "A low oven and you have to wait until it reaches 190-200°. Don't pull it apart with your fingers; use forks. That way the flesh doesn't lose texture. And buy the pork butt." Spoken like a true farmer. Ernie loved to cook and the Zirkles' gumbo has been a favorite of the International Shorebird Recovery Team for many years.

It seems everyone has Ernie stories. Often I will ask someone how they know Ernie and they will reply, "I was in 4H; everyone in 4H knows Ernie!" often followed by, "He's one heck of a nice guy." I couldn't go to the veterinarian's without Doc Hennessy asking, "How are the Zirkles?" or "Have you spoken to Ernie lately?"

On hearing of Ernie's passing Sue Fenili told me about the time she called him for assistance. Apparently, on the last day of school her children helped load her car. Unbeknownst to her they also loaded "Fat Albert," the classroom's hamster. The poor ball of fur was overcome by heat by the time she discovered the mistake. She had heard that Dr. Zirkle was "a kind and wonderful vet." When she told him of the hamster's physical state, he listened patiently but explained kindly that he was a large animal vet. Nonetheless he affirmed that the poor rodent was doubtless dehydrated and had heatstroke. He suggested running it under lukewarm water and praying a lot, anticipating a grave outcome. Sadly, Fat Albert did not make it. Sue felt bad about the outcome but never forgot how sweet Ernie was when she was in SOS mode. Ernie was a truly compassionate individual.

Leslie Ficcaglia remembered the time that she and her husband left their Great Dane with their son while they went on a two-week trip to France. Poor Maia was so traumatized at being abandoned by her people that she refused to drink, eat, or relieve herself. Finally, at his wit's end, their son brought her over to see Ernie, who advised him to take her to her home and try feeding her there. She eventually settled down but was very happy to see her people return. Leslie also has many fond memories of preparing game for the freezer with her husband and the Zirkles and exchanging tomato seedlings and garden advice with them. She recalls many evenings around the Ficcaglias' and the Zirkles' fireplaces sharing delicious meals and talking about the environment and politics and grandchildren. Ernie was a special person who will be sorely missed by those who loved him.

Ernie's wife Cindy asked all of Ernie's friends to pray during his final days. She was finally able to bring him home after being separated from him for weeks because of hospital rules adopted for the pandemic. He was so thankful to be reunited with his wife, his family, and his river. I'm so happy he made it home. He loved his farm and more than anything else he loved Cindy. She was a fantastic advocate for Ernie through the health challenges he endured over the past few years.

Cindy, thank you for loving and caring for Ernie, a man loved by so many. May great memories sustain you. To Ernie's family and many friends and colleagues we offer our condolences and a final thought: we were lucky to have known him.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jane Minter DeLuca". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.



Ernest "Ernie" Zirkle

February 25, 1936 - January 30, 2021

Ernest William Zirkle, DVM, 84 of Fairfield Township passed away peacefully at home on Saturday, January 30, 2021. The son of the late Clarence Zirkle and Bertie Bowman Zirkle, he was born on February 25, 1936 in Quicksburg, Virginia. He was born on a farm that included both livestock and crops.

He graduated from V.P.I. in 1958 and the University of Georgia, School of Veterinary Medicine in 1965. He was the owner of the Wilwyn Animal Hospital from 1965 to 1979 when he joined the NJ Department of Agriculture becoming the State Veterinarian until his retirement in 2003. In 2000 he was elected president of the United States Animal Health Association, a national organization that develops policy guidelines and policy for the livestock industry.

Ernie was predeceased by his brother, Luther. He is survived by his wife, Cindy and children, Lorraine (Kendall Maddox), Scarlette (Brad Gotwals), Doug (Judy Perella) and Gwen (Kelton Glasscock), stepchildren, Kim (Gene Carrell) and Jodi (Seren Morey), 14 grandchildren and 12 great grandchildren.

Throughout his life Ernie was dedicated to serving his community in numerous capacities including; 4H Leader, Cohanzick Zoo, CRHS Board of Education, Deputy Mayor of Fairfield Township, and Cohansey River Preservation to name a few. His favorite organization was the Grits Mafia, a social group of veterinarians organized following his retirement party in 2003. Ernie's pride and joy was his organic garden, where he grew a wide variety of vegetables, his fruit orchard and herb garden. Four freezers filled with his produce attested to his farming skills and delight in agriculture.

Ernie was dearly loved by his extended family, many friends and many business and professional acquaintances.



Cindy said, "Ernie was always busy doing things around the house and farm."



Ernie on the banks of the Cohansey.

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