



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI VETERINARIAN WINS AMERICA'S BEST VET HONOR; FOUR REGIONAL WINNERS ALSO NAMED**

*Dr. James Cook Chosen as Winner from More Than 1,000 Nominations for "Thank Your Vet for a Healthy Pet Contest," Sponsored by Morris Animal Foundation, Merial and BowTie, Inc.*

**Nov. 6, 2007/Denver** – Veterinarians play a critical role in keeping our pets healthy, happy and living longer. For University of Missouri veterinarian James L. Cook, DVM, Ph.D., going above and beyond when it comes to caring for animals is second nature. In recognition of his dedication to improving the lives of animals, Cook has been named the grand-prize national winner of the "Thank Your Vet for a Healthy Pet" essay contest. He was chosen from more than 1,000 nominations from pet owners throughout the country.

Cook, who is the director of the Comparative Orthopaedic Laboratory at the University of Missouri, was also the Midwest regional winner. Four regional winners were named: James Thomas, VMD, of Eagle Veterinary Clinic, Havertown, Pa., for the Northeast; Bob Encinosa, DVM, of Boyette Animal Hospital, Riverview, Fla., for the Southeast; Tim R. Stone, DVM, Rittiman Road Animal Hospital, San Antonio, for the Southwest; and Thomas R. Nickerson, DVM, of Trinity Animal Hospital, Weaverville, Calif., for the West.

"Veterinarians are so important in strengthening the human-animal bond," said Patricia N. Olson, DVM, Ph.D., president/CEO of Morris Animal Foundation. "We were delighted that so many pet owners wrote to honor their veterinarians for the good work that they do on behalf of animals. These professionals truly deserve recognition."

The "Thank Your Vet for a Healthy Pet" contest was sponsored by Morris Animal Foundation, Merial Limited and BowTie, Inc. Cook is featured in the December issues of BowTie's *Dog Fancy*, *Cat Fancy* and *Veterinary Practice News* magazines as well as on DogChannel.com and CatChannel.com. A full list of nominees is available at [www.MorrisAnimalFoundation.org](http://www.MorrisAnimalFoundation.org).

"Merial is proud to honor all of the nominees and we are especially proud to recognize Dr. Jimi Cook as the national winner," said Howell "Hal" Little, DVM, director, Field Veterinary Services for

Merial. “Dr. Cook truly is an awe inspiring veterinarian who has been honored with numerous teaching and research awards, is in demand as a national and international lecturer, and is recognized as a gifted surgeon, teacher and clinician. Armed with vision, dedication, and drive, Dr. Cook has committed his life’s work to improving the health and lives of animals and the people that love them.”

Michael Ray of Deltona, Fla., and Sherri Rusch of Warrensburg, Mo., both nominated Cook, whom his clients call Jimi. Cook performed eight surgeries over nine years to help Rusch’s Labrador-golden retriever mix, who suffered from multiple disorders affecting both hips and both knees. Ray, who was paralyzed nearly 30 years ago by a gunshot wound, contacted Cook after his service dog, Eagle, developed lameness in his front left leg. Cook had developed an arthroscopic procedure that had a high success rate for treating conditions like Eagle’s and upon Ray’s request, Cook flew to the University of Florida to perform the surgery and train the staff at the university.

“Eagle is back to normal again,” Ray says. “Not only did Jimi save my best friend and companion from a life of pain and misery, he also gave me back my service dog.”

Cook is well known for his orthopedic research, which has benefited both dogs and humans. He and his wife, Cristi, also have spent time in Africa, building houses with Habitat for Humanity and rebuilding a school in Rwanda that was destroyed in the 1994 genocide. Cook says he is extremely honored to win the national award and appreciates the time his clients took to nominate him.

“I’ve been fortunate to receive a number of different awards in my career, but this award is probably the most meaningful,” he says. “I want my work and my life to make a difference in people’s lives and animal’s lives. In these cases, making a difference in a dog’s life, made such a difference in these special people’s lives and this award helps me always remember that and be motivated by it.”

All of the winners will be honored in front of their peers at the Western Veterinary Conference in Las Vegas on Feb. 19, 2008.

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#### **About Morris Animal Foundation:**

Morris Animal Foundation, established in 1948, is dedicated to funding research that protects, treats and cures companion animals and wildlife. MAF has been at the forefront of funding breakthrough research studies benefiting animals in some 100 countries, spanning all seven continents on earth. MAF has its headquarters in Denver, Colorado. The Foundation has funded nearly 1,400 humane animal health studies with funds totaling more than \$51 million. One hundred percent of annual donations go to fund health study programs. For more information, call (800) 243-2345, or visit [www.MorrisAnimalFoundation.org](http://www.MorrisAnimalFoundation.org).

**About Merial:** Merial is a world-leading, innovation-driven animal health company, providing a comprehensive range of products to enhance the health, well-being and performance of a wide range of animals. Merial employs approximately 5,000 people and operates in more than 150 countries worldwide. Its 2006 sales were nearly \$2.2 billion. Merial Limited is a joint venture between Merck & Co., Inc., and sanofi-aventis. For more information, please see [www.merial.com](http://www.merial.com).

**About BowTie, Inc.:** BowTie, Inc. is the leader in special interest pet magazines, trade magazines, books and websites dedicated to pet-loving consumers, pet-supply retailers, veterinarians, breeders, and pet professionals worldwide. Divisions of BowTie, Inc. include BowTie Magazines, BowTie Press, BowTie News, Thoroughbred Times Company, Global Distribution Services, and AnimalNetwork.com.