

The right chemistry: Alfred University alumna creates scholarship in honor of Wes Bentz

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Susan Kelleher '90 and Greg Martin

An alumna who credits Dr. Wes Bentz, professor emeritus of chemistry at Alfred University, with inspiring her own love of chemistry is creating a scholarship in his honor, and inviting others to join her.

Susan Kelleher '90, '16HD may very well be the best-known veterinarian in the United States as the star of “Dr. K&S Exotic Animal ER,” now in its fifth season on the NatGeo Wild channel. Part of the reason for her ability to treat the exotic animals, sometimes in some pretty unusual ways, is her background in chemistry, courtesy of Dr. Bentz and Alfred University.

“I truly credit Alfred University and Dr. Bentz for making me the clinician I am today,” Kelleher said. “My background in chemistry has helped me in so many cases that absolutely would have died if I had used a more traditional, textbook, veterinary approach.”

As one example, she cites her treatment of an African Gray Parrot that was “eggbound and severely dehydrated.” Testing the bird’s uric acid level, she discovered that it was five times the normal level. She immediately started an IV, trying to reverse the uric acid level rapidly. A job applicant who was interviewing with her, and who “really knew his medicine,” questioned her about the rate at which she was pushing fluids into the bird. “I finally realized I was not in the veterinary medicine compartment in my mind, I was in the chemistry filing cabinet.” Her radical treatment worked, though, and she saved the bird.

The credit for creating that “chemistry filing cabinet” in her brain belongs to Dr. Bentz. As a first-year student, Kelleher said she struggled with Chem 105, but Dr. Bentz tutored her so that chemistry became her favorite subject. In a letter to Dr. Bentz, telling him about the scholarship she and her husband Greg Martin are establishing in his honor, Kelleher wrote, “I don’t have the words to tell you how much all those hours you spent tutoring me in your office meant to me, and how much they helped me... You helped me truly understand chemistry.”

Kelleher went on to tutor other Alfred University student in chemistry, and then to become a teaching assistant in Dr. Bentz’s labs. “I learned you truly don’t understand a subject until you can teach it. It was hard, but so

incredibly worthwhile for a lifetime of lessons.” Her veterinary school classmates benefitted as well, albeit indirectly, from Dr. Bentz’s teaching, as Kelleher became their unofficial chemistry tutor.

“Alfred University is a place that is, and always has been, very dear to my heart,” Kelleher said. “By the grace of God, my husband and I are finally in a position where I can give back. Alfred University gave me so much.”

Kelleher has earmarked the Bentz scholarship for a student who “tries really hard and needs the support,” and who is, of course, a chemistry major.

Other alumni with degrees in chemistry, as well as alumni with other majors who benefitted from Dr. Bentz’s teaching, [may also donate](#) to the Bentz Scholarship by going to the Alfred University giving site, and selecting the scholarship from the pulldown menu.

After graduation from Alfred University with majors in chemistry and biology, Kelleher attended the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine, graduating in 1995. After working with other veterinary practices, Kelleher started her own practice, Broward Avian and Exotic Animal Hospital, where she specializes in the care of birds and exotic pets. She hosts veterinary externs from all over the United States and abroad, and is well-known as a lecturer at both national and international veterinary meetings.

Susan Kelleher and Greg Martin are the parents of three children: Elba, Claire and Myles, and they make their home in southern Florida.

Bentz began teaching chemistry at Alfred University in 1970. Even though he "retired" in 2007 after 37 years and was awarded emeritus status at that time, he continued to teach in the department on an as-needed basis. Along the way, he amassed a near-record number of Excellence in Teaching Awards and was named a Kruson Distinguished Professor in May 2005.

Bentz chaired the University Faculty Council and was a member of the Advisory Committee for the Health Professions. He also chaired the Chemistry Department.

Active professionally in the Corning Section of the American Chemical Society, including as chair and a member of its executive committee, Bentz received the Sullivan Award for his contributions to the profession and the Corning Section.

He has been a member of the A.E. Crandall Hook and Ladder Co., the village of Alfred’s volunteer fire department and rescue squad, for more than 40 years. He has been a driving force in the Alfred Community Chest, raising money for local charities, and serving as spokesperson for the area United Way agencies. For more than a decade, he coordinated the Alfred University blood drives for the American Red Cross; and served as a member of the Allegany County Hazardous Materials Response Team.