I want to thank the selection committee for honoring me with this prestigious award. To be the recipient of an award in tribute to Dr. Bartlett is an extreme honor and very humbling. Frankly, there are not words to describe the honor bestowed on me nor my feelings and emotions. After reviewing the list of previous recipients the experience has become even more humbling. There is an expression used in my part of the world “walking in high cotton”. By joining this elite group of individuals who I have admired and respected for years I am certainly “walking in high cotton”. I can assure you that there are many other individuals more deserving of this recognition than myself, but certainly none more appreciative.

The only downside to this recognition is the conformation of passage into senior citizenship. Many people have mentored me and contributed to the development of my career and I will refer to them during this presentation. Several of them I will mention by name, but there are too many to name all of them and express my gratitude.

Most of all I want to thank my wife Karen for her love, support and tolerance throughout the thirty-six years of our marriage. I also want to thank my children Jennie, Kelly and Trace for the same traits as their Mom love, support and tolerance. A wise old man once told me that children are like your dog or your horse. Sometimes you are so proud of them you could bust and there are other times you don’t want to claim them. I have been able to be proud many more times than not claiming them.

When these two organizations established their beginnings in 1954 I was a six year old farm boy in the hills of East Tennessee destined to become a Theriogenologist. Little did I know that my path would someday cross that of some of those founders. I was the son of a farmer and an elementary school teacher. I want to thank my parents and grandparents for a wonderful childhood. Growing up on that farm molded me for the rest of my life. It was a diversified operation with crops of tobacco, wheat, oats, corn, soybeans and a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. Our livestock consisted of beef and dairy cattle, horses and mules, sheep, goats, hogs, hunting dogs, barn and house cats and a variety of poultry. Not many things came from the grocery store. By nine years of age I knew I wanted to become a veterinarian. I knew the gestation length and number of offspring of all the various farm animals we had. I knew the orifice those offspring came out of and to the horror and embarrassment of my mother and grandmother I knew how they got in there. I inherited my love of animals and curiosity from my Dad and my desire and ability to teach from my Mom and I thank them for those traits. I also want to thank them for their financial support and sacrifices which allowed my sister and me to complete our educations with very little debt.

I owe a debt of gratitude to all my undergraduate professors. I am especially grateful to the faculty of Auburn University College of Veterinary Medicine between 1969 and 1973 for their efforts. I had no idea at the time that I would eventually become one of them.

I graduated from Auburn in 1973 and went into a mixed practice in North Carolina working for Dr. Lewis Puckett. I will forever be grateful for his patience and all he taught me. Practice was good for me. I learned a lot and even met my wife during that time. However; after a while I realized that our practice was not fulfilling my greatest professional interest and desire: Theriogenology.

In those days most of the advanced technology, modern equipment, science and research seemed to be associated with veterinary colleges. (Due to budgetary issues that is not necessarily true today.) So my next step to quench my thirst for Theriogenology was to do a residency.

In 1975 I became a Theriogenology resident at the University of Georgia. I had some great mentors and friends there: Drs. John McCormick, John Williams, Don Witherspoon, Al Caudle and Steve Van Camp. I thank them for their efforts and friendship.

In 1978 I became an assistant professor in the Department of Large Animal Surgery and Medicine at Auburn University where after thirty-two years I am still employed. In 1978 this was a dream job. I was now a colleague of the Large Animal Clinic faculty who had taught me as a veterinary student. A faculty I still have a tremendous admiration and respect for. I will always be grateful for the support and mentorship of Drs. Bob Hudson, Tom Vaughn, Don Walker, John Winkler, Jay Humburg, Agee Wiggins, Ram Purohit, and Tom Powe. To be able to work closely with those individuals at the beginning of my academic career was an awesome experience. I cannot speak of Auburn without recognizing two of my colleagues of close to thirty years and thanking them for their friendship, cooperation and support: Drs. Dwight Wolfe and Gatz Riddell.
Some of you will remember the meeting that did not happen: Mobile Alabama 1979. Candidates for the oral portion of the Diplomate examination were tested on Tuesday September 12 while Hurricane Fredrick picked up speed in Mobile Bay. I was one of those candidates. After completing my orals I headed for the safety of higher ground and returned 225 miles inland to Auburn. The candidates who chose to weather the storm found out their results shortly before the storm made land fall and then were exposed to one of the more frightening experiences of their lives. Dr. Bob Hudson had chosen to weather the storm in Mobile. Back at Auburn on Wednesday one message had gotten through from him that everybody was alright, but the meeting was canceled. No word regarding my success or failure. I was relieved that everybody had weathered the storm without any serious consequences, but was concerned about my results. I imagined that Dr. Hudson wanted to give me the bad news in person, and decided I would take a week off then start studying again. I will always remember three days after the examination Friday morning September 15 an extremely tired, sleep deprived and worn out Dr. Bob Hudson congratulated me in the office we shared on becoming a Diplomate of the American College of Theriogenologists; he wanted to give me the good news personally.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and thanks to the twenty two plus Theriogenology residents and graduate students that I have had the privilege to either direct or assist in the direction of their training. I want to thank them for their diligence, intellect, hard work and enthusiasm. Often I learned more from them than they did from me. They have gone on to have very successful careers of their own. One of them I would like to especially recognize who never reached his potential Dr. Allen Heath who tragically lost his life in 2003.

Another group of Auburn people I want to thank and recognize are the members of the Food Animal Section including faculty, residents and technicians both past and present. I have had the privilege of being their Section Chief for over fifteen years. They are without question some of the hardest working, most cooperative, talented and intelligent individuals one could ever know and work with.

I appreciate the confidence and trust of clients and referring veterinarians. It is always flattering when they seek your advice and opinion and trust your clinical capabilities.

I cannot have spent over thirty-five years in academia without recognizing one of the primary reasons I chose this career path: the students. Combining Georgia and Auburn I have had the good fortune to teach over 3200 veterinary students. On clinical rotations I have been able to get to know them quite well, and in many cases life-long friendships have been created. It is impossible to remember all their names and faces, but I applaud them for their enthusiasm, efforts and endurance of reaching their dream of becoming veterinarians.

Theriogenology as a recognized specialty is relatively young when compared to some other specialties; however, as a practiced discipline it is ancient. Theriogenology began when man first decided to selectively mate animals. Early man investigated facts we just assume have been known forever simple but yet complex facts. An example is the gestation length of the various species a simple but time consuming controlled study. I consider myself a second generation Theriogenologist benefiting from a wealth of knowledge generated by the first generation; those individuals who started these two organizations. Individuals like Dr. Bartlett and Dr. Roberts, and other individuals on the list of previous recipients of this prestigious award. Scientists who were frequently armed with only their physical senses, ability for physical diagnosis, a desire for knowledge, the tenacity and perseverance to learn and the willingness to share their discoveries. We owe those founders and forbearers a tremendous debt.

As a second generation Theriogenologist I have seen many changes and advances. Procedures, products and technologies that are commonplace today seemed to have developed over night. PGF2α and GnRH used daily by many of us were only identified some thirty odd years ago. Frozen semen was pretty much limited to the bovine species. Sexed semen was merely a desirable idea. Embryo transfer also was limited primarily to the bovine species. Embryo collection was accomplished by surgically flushing the uterine tube. Transfers were also surgical and success was limited to only fresh embryos. Frozen embryos, follicular aspiration, in vitro fertilization and fetal sexing were research ideas that would materialize into common practices. The thought of cloning was introduced to the general public in a 1978 movie starring Gregory Peck titled the “Boys from Brazil”. Manuscripts, thesis, and dissertations were done on electric type writers. A change to one sentence frequently resulted in retyping the entire document. Literature searches were done manually by wading through volumes of Index Medicus and Index Veterinarius. Peer reviews were dependent on the postal service and were quite time-consuming. Hormonal assays were expensive, labor intense, time-consuming and frequently had a wide margin of error. The first ultrasound machines had a screen about one-half the size of a postcard and an image that was likened to that of a black
and white television with poor rabbit ear reception. Computers were large cumbersome devices occupying rooms and buildings not desks and laps. Yes, we have come a long way, and the third, fourth and beyond generations of Theriogenologists will go even farther.

The science of Theriogenology covers a diverse population of species. Career choices in Theriogenology are as diverse as the species we study. Broad categories of careers include but are certainly not limited to private practice, research laboratories, industry and academia. Each of these career pathways is dependent on the others and all are essential to the practice and advancement of Theriogenology.

The private sector is where many new ideas and procedures originate. The private sector is also a place where both common and new problems are first recognized. It is also the ultimate proving ground for new products, technology, and procedures. The research laboratory is the arena for new discoveries and the advancement of basic knowledge. Industry takes new discoveries and new ideas and develops them into products and technologies, and makes those available to all. Academia frequently requires research and development as well, but is saddled with the responsibility of incorporating basic knowledge and recent advancements into the minds of our future colleagues. None of these career choices is more important than any of the others. That being said each deserves respect, appreciation and admiration from the others.

Regardless of our career path we are dependent on the success and knowledge of those who chose a different direction. As you attend the scientific sessions over the next few days you will witness representation from all those career categories, and I hope you will come away with an appreciation of the dependency we have on one another. I encourage you to attend a session regarding a species other than that of your primary interest. You will learn something new and will gain an appreciation and respect for those in a different species arena.

I have discussed a little bit about the past of Theriogenology now I would like to give you my thoughts and opinions on the present and future. Think about this for a moment, if Theriogenology fails so does all veterinary medicine. Our discipline is responsible for the control, continuation and conservation of the animal population. We have now entered an era of what can best be described as a scientific explosion; an explosion consisting of once unimaginable advancements of knowledge, technology, information and capabilities. The question is what are we going to do with this explosion? We are going to have more tools available to us than ever before. The benefits of this scientific explosion; however, are not just gifts without strings attached. These benefits come with responsibilities and challenges.

We cannot afford to be satisfied and complacent with the status quo, therefore we all need to be participants in the advancement of our discipline. We must remember lessons learned from the past. Lessons like the ability to use our physical senses and being able to perform a good physical examination, and remembering to examine the whole animal not just the reproductive system. We must remember population medicine to examine the entire group not just the ones that are obviously affected. We must have respect and compassion for the animals entrusted in our care. Owner communication, respect, honesty and compassion will always be essential. Moral and ethical responsibilities, challenges and decisions will increase with this scientific explosion. We must never lose sight of practicality and always have the good sense to recognize our limitations and be able to admit when nothing else can be done. Just like in the past we will make mistakes, have failures and successes. We must learn from our mistakes and failures because if we do not we are likely to repeat them. After mistakes and failures we will need to have the tenacity and perseverance to keep trying. We should enjoy our successes but must not over indulge in self-worth. We must be willing to share developments and advances for the benefit of all. We must not let egos get in the way of scientific advancement. Professional behavior and respect for colleagues must remain essential to our character. Development and advancement of Theriogenology will only continue to grow and the possibilities of the future are beyond imagination.

I will admit struggling with a summary and closing of this presentation especially when looking toward the future, but there it was hanging on the wall in my office. You will recognize these words which are relevant to the past, present and future.

Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine, I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health, the relief of animal suffering, the conservation of livestock resources, the promotion of public health and the advancement of medical knowledge.
I will practice my profession conscientiously, with dignity and in keeping with the principles of veterinary medical ethics. I accept as a lifelong obligation the continual improvement of my professional knowledge and competence.

Thank you for this prestigious honor and for listening to me.