

## Mules March on for University of Missouri

**Hardy equines have a long-standing tradition in the state of Missouri.**

03-03-2007

Truman the Tiger is the University of Missouri-Columbia's mascot. Other lesser known but loved MU mascots are the mules that belong to the school's College of Veterinary Medicine. A recent gift from the estate of Virginia Etheridge ensures that the mule team will continue their public relations efforts for the college and the university. The mules have represented the college, MU and Missouri to thousands of people since 1982. Pulling a dozen-passenger wagon, they've paraded in MU homecomings, governor inaugurations, Missouri State Fair opening ceremonies, the St. Louis Charity Horse Show and the Kansas City American Royal Parade, as well as small town parades, picnics and weddings. The mules are the first farm animals that many city kids see in person.

Etheridge was no stranger to the college. With the help of Hill's Pet Nutrition and Bayer Pharmaceuticals, she donated funds for the purchase of two mules. She also donated her time to bring treats for the mules. For more than two decades, Etheridge brought the mules fresh carrots and apples on most Sunday afternoons.

How did mules become such ambassadors? Because mules can withstand heat that horses cannot, they were important in the early days of American cotton and tobacco production. They also were an important part of Missouri's early economy. Missouri became an important provider of mules because of westward expansion; mules were sold to pioneers, carried freight, cleared trees to start farms and even pulled trains and riverboats. When motorized alternatives became popular, the mules faded slowly from Missouri agriculture. The students who care for the MU mule team today are practicing skills almost forgotten in the 21st century.