

PHYSICIAN OF THE YEAR

VICTORIA M. STEVENS, M.D.



Daughter of a ranching family, Dr. Stevens grew up in central Arizona, home of the San Carlos Apaches. She is a member of the San Carlos Apache Tribe, and despite choosing a career in orthopaedic surgery, has remained in the place she was born. Now retired from private practice, she is vice-chairman of the board of directors of the San Carlos Apache Healthcare Corporation, working to guide the delivery of patient care at the nearly new P.L. 638 Hospital her tribe has established.

Hands-on patient care and advocacy have been her interest since choosing a career in medicine. After graduating from Escuela Nacional Normal in Alcora, Argentina and Globe High School in Globe, Arizona, Dr. Stevens (Vikki) began as a premed student at the University of Arizona in Tucson. This made it easy to travel home many weekends to work at the ranch with her father, who was manager of the San Carlos Apache Tribal Registered Herd of Hereford cattle. She stayed close to her extended family in San Carlos. This closeness gave her strength; she credits her family connections and

attachment to the Apache homelands as a continuing source of power in her personal and professional life.

It was apparent that a premed course was not her cup of tea already in freshman year, which was made busier by duties for the Tucson Chamber of Commerce as Tucson Rodeo Queen. A love of science was developing in her thinking, however, her original plan to major in psychology and become a psychiatrist seemed doomed by the nature of the premed program. (The idea to become a psychiatrist hatched after her high school English teacher advised her that doctors got paid much better than counselors or psychologists!) Having enrolled in a liberal arts degree, with a plan to follow a premedical curriculum, she had increased exposure to biology and math, which then changed her original plan. Recruited to Wellesley College for her sophomore year, she subsequently missed home so badly she returned to Tucson (University of Arizona) and decided to major in microbiology. She received her Bachelor of Science with honors, took the MCAT, and applied to medical school. She applied to only one, the University of Arizona, because if she didn't get in, she was planning to do something else that didn't involve leaving home. When she graduated, she received the Robie Award, given to an outstanding senior woman, for her cumulative GPA and campus activities that included Indian student affairs.

MedStart was crucial in Vikki's preparation for entry into medical school. It was an invaluable opportunity to see the institution from the inside before the classes began in the late summer of 1973. For the next three years, home was sometimes only a distant thought, despite being in Tucson, because of the work load. Unsure still that medicine would fulfill the need to be involved with helping humanity, Vikki went to the Dean's office after her first year, before clinicals began, and quit. He told her to go home and think it over. Returning to the ranch and working with her parents, who did not pressure her,