

TRACKS

MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2023

"We're focused on you and your pet and teaching the next generation of veterinarians how to take care of them."

RE-ENERGIZED

Small Animal Community Practice Ready to Expand

TRACKS MAGAZINE 2023

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College of Veterinary Medicine

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MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN



Another inspiring academic year has passed at the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, as we send forth more veterinarians, Ph.D. scientists, and public health graduates with bachelor's and master's degrees to live out Virginia Tech's Ut Prosim motto ("That I May Serve"). Although each year brings new faces among our students, faculty, and staff, the values we seek to uphold remain steadfast. We have declared those values in our strategic plan, with its pillars of promoting well-being and community in our college; enhancing educational opportunities; promoting discovery and scholarship; providing compassionate and impactful clinical services; and advancing One Health initiatives that improve the health of the environment, animals, humans, and human communities, including marginalized groups.

These priorities can be seen within the pages of this issue of *TRACKS*. Alumni from our college such as veterinary oral surgeon Kendall Taney are seeking new educational opportunities to stretch their expertise to improve compassionate clinical care for animal patients and the humans who care for them. Similarly, Fidelis Hegngi, Christina Loiacono, Jessica Walters, and Carrie Bissett are among those on the front lines fighting the avian flu outbreak and improving overall health

of the environment for animals and humans alike. CPRAC, or community practice, impacts the local community in Blacksburg with top-notch clinical care of pets. Addressing the well-being of equine veterinarians, while also improving clinical care for patients and clients, is the goal of new initiatives at the Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center in Leesburg, Virginia.

In the months ahead, VMCVM will seek to advance our strategic plan in many exciting ways. We are undertaking a process to holistically review and revise our Doctor of Veterinary Medicine curriculum. The Center for Public and Corporate Veterinary Medicine, led by Valerie Ragan and Cassidy Rist, has been reviewed by an external team as it seeks to become a Center for Excellence in guiding new opportunities to improve the well-being of veterinarians who seek a new career track. And, of course, we maintain our focus on continuing to attract the donor support necessary for an expansion and renovation of our Veterinary Teaching Hospital. We appreciate everyone who supports this college in any way as we continue to make this journey in pursuit of excellence and impact, and we hope you enjoy this issue of *TRACKS*.

M. Daniel Givens

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SUMMER 2023



Public health students Niema Smith (left) and Louisa Obenwa (right) celebrate at commencement.

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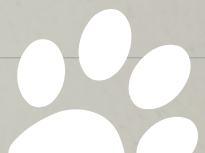
SMALL ANIMAL COMMUNITY PRACTICE RE-ENERGIZED

Ready to expand clientele for primary care veterinary services

CPRAC IS BACK ON TRACK.

Small Animal Community Practice – CPRAC, commonly pronounced "SEE-prak" – is a clinic within the Veterinary Teaching Hospital (VTH) at the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine that accepts pets from a 35-mile radius of Blacksburg.

"It's small animal primary care here at the veterinary college," said Jenny Marin, who joined CPRAC as a clinical assistant professor in 2022. "We do a lot of preventive care, vaccines, parasite prevention, disease prevention, things like that. A lot of holistic care, looking at the whole animal and making sure we're addressing every little thing from their eyes and their ears to the heart and their ability to get around."



These are not referrals, but community members who bring their pets for checkups and basic health care, as they would with any private-practice veterinarian.

"CPRAC, along with the emergency room, are the only two services that you don't need a referral to access," said Anthony Grafsky, hospital administrator for the VTH. "These are our services that are open to everybody."

After some loss of personnel and other challenges during the pandemic years, the practice is fully staffed once again, and looking to expand its clientele.

CPRAC recently added Mary Songster-Alpin as its newest clinical assistant professor in community practice. Erin Phoenix '11, DVM '17, hired last year as an instructor in the Animal Care in Education program, has also been added as a clinical assistant professor in CPRAC.

They join Marin, Mark Freeman (hired in 2012, recently promoted to clinical associate professor) and Michael Nappier (hired in 2015, promoted to clinical associate professor in 2020) as full-time clinicians, giving the practice a complete lineup.

Additionally, Rebecca Parsons DVM '20 has stepped in as a clinical instructor and Kelly Mallette — a major in the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps — has been serving as a resident. The service also presently has five licensed veterinary technicians and a veterinary assistant to support the clinicians.

Grafsky said CPRAC saw 2,854 cases between March 2022 and February 2023, down 3.5 percent from the previous year. But with plans to increase caseload from 12 to 18 a day soon, those numbers could jolt upward in the year ahead.

While the practice serves the community by providing another option for veterinary care, it also provides an important educational opportunity for veterinary students, about three-quarters of which will enter companion animal primary care upon graduation.

"The reason community practice is here, is to give our students an opportunity to have a primary care, or regular general practice, companion animal experience, within the confines of the teaching hospital," said Nappier.

"We're a regular general practice with the addition of vet students. Whereas your regular practice's goal is solely focused on you and your pet, we're focused on you and your pet and teaching the next generation of veterinarians how to take care of them."

"The vast majority of our students go into general practice," said Freeman, whose arrival in 2012 was only a couple of years after CPRAC started. "So, we feel it's really important for students to get an experience that replicates what they will be doing in practice, day to day."



As a result of the teaching aspect, the appointments take longer for clients than those at most private practices, but "we have more eyes on things," Nappier said.

"I think a lot of our clients who come here enjoy interacting with the students," Nappier said. "It's just fun for them. Many of our clients are in some way involved in education, whether here at the university or local K-12 schools."

One advantage to clients utilizing the practice is the resources of the full hospital and its many specialties being easily accessible.

"When I need to get an echocardiogram, it's usually the same day," Nappier said. "I can get an ultrasound exam the same day, we have anesthesiologists to consult, we have a lab that I can just run my samples to on foot."

"When they come to see us, they are essentially coming to see the whole hospital," Freeman said.

Freeman said CPRAC strives to make its care affordable for clients.

"I feel like the one area of emphasis that we have tried to consistently provide, and I think we've done well on, is providing what is now being referred to, and very heavily focused on, as spectrum of care," Freeman said. "We always offer the very best we have to offer. But we do understand that there are limitations to what clients can do. And if they can't meet us at our gold standard, we can offer other more affordable options. And I think we've managed to do that consistently."

"We're excited to expand our primary care education for students," Marin said. "COVID was hard on everybody. And there were some changes. We needed some more people to replace folks who had left. Now, we're adding doctors. The goal is to get more appointments for students to see and be able to help as many patients and their people as we can. COVID hit that a little bit hard; we didn't have as many patients coming in. There's a lot of interest in refocusing on primary care education for students. That is what we do."



Team Tootsie

Veterinary hospital and owners help poodle walk again

Like most older dogs, Tootsie the standard poodle has arthritis that slows her down a little — but in early 2023, Tootsie began to trip and fall. The dog's owner, Mary Jane Barrett of Roanoke, described it as a "belly flop."

A veterinarian determined that Tootsie's problem was neurological and referred her to the Veterinary Teaching Hospital (VTH) at the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine. Tootsie was unable to stand up and had to be wheeled in on a gurney at VTH the next day.

After an MRI, VTH specialists determined that Tootsie had a condition called cervical spondylomyelopathy, also known as wobbler syndrome.

Wobbler syndrome occurs when the spinal cord is compressed due to a narrowing of the spinal canal. In Tootsie's case, a disc protrusion was bulging between vertebrae, interfering with the normal function of the spinal cord.

"It's scary. We were petrified to make the decision: surgery or medicine," Barrett said.

The Barretts and Tootsie's team at VTH decided surgery was the best option.

"Going into surgery, we discussed that it could take months for her to get back up and walk again," said Kayla Fowler, chief neurology/neurosurgery resident.

But with treatment, physical therapy, and the support of her owner and clinicians, Tootsie is exceeding expectations.

Certified canine rehabilitation practitioner Flori Bliss began to notice a difference within two to three days. By week two, Tootsie could lay on a side and lift a paw to shake hands. Bliss incorporated laser therapy, massage, and manual therapy to get Tootsie's muscles prepared to walk. Through physical therapy exercises, Tootsie learned to sit up, stand up, and eventually walk again.

"She has had cheerleaders on her side through and through. Some days have been harder than others, but it's been great to encourage her and say 'Come on, Tootsie, you got it!'" said Kimberly Winck, a veterinary assistant in the neurology department.

After staying at the VTH for weeks, Tootsie is back home and walking again, long-term rehab continuing.

“There have been lots of tears. The first day that she just got up on her own and walked to her water bowl, I cried. Watching her walk from the car to therapy has just fulfilled every kind of emotion. My daughter said it best: 'Mom, it's like watching your kid take their first step.'”

-Mary Jane Barrett, Tootsie's owner



THE POWER OF CLINICAL TRIALS

How Rhett progressed the science of cancer treatment

For Sarah Rollins, receiving a cancer diagnosis for her 6-year-old dog Rhett was gut-wrenching. "We'd just returned from our honeymoon, the Thursday before the July 4th weekend, and Rhett had started not to eat. When we got the results back, what do we do? I was going crazy, googling everything."

Within a week of Rhett's diagnosis, he had an appointment at the Animal Cancer Care and Research Center in Roanoke to explore those options.

As a fourth-year veterinary student, Rollins is no stranger to the ins and outs of diagnostics and treatment, but the news of Rhett's lymphoma still took a toll, and she had a lot of questions. "For me, the vets at the ACCRC are some of the few vets that can genuinely give you the A to Z of your options for treating this disease."

One of those options was an ongoing clinical study at the ACCRC: researchers are studying a new lymphoma drug protocol that reduces treatment time and cost of lymphoma treatment. Not only did Rhett progress the science of cancer treatment by enrolling in the study, but the clinical trial covered some of the imaging and drug costs.

Rollins says that the experience with Rhett's cancer will make her a better vet — as well as igniting an interest in oncology, it has allowed her to better empathize with clients.

"I have become so humbled by this experience. We're taught about how bad lymphoma is, but you don't understand until you have a dog that has lymphoma and you are the client trying to choose options. It's very eye-opening, and I have so much respect and empathy for our clients and our patients."

After the first two chemotherapy treatments in July, Rollins saw a difference in Rhett. He was in remission by August, and by October, he was finished with his treatments. He visits the ACCRC monthly for re-checks.

Rollins is delighted that Rhett enjoys his visits to the ACCRC.

"Each animal is unique, but the transformation in my dog's life amazed me. Once he began treatment, it was like a complete turnaround, which left me astounded. How could anyone not opt for that?"



MONA LISA KEEPS MAKING SMILES

Mona Lisa — Mony for short — grew up to be a sweet and social cat who loves to bring people toys. In the loving home of Gary and Rebecca Davis, Mony has all the toys a cat could want — and her own bedroom.

"I can't imagine our life without her," said Rebecca.

In early 2022, Mony began to have trouble breathing. At the Veterinary Teaching Hospital at the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, Mony was diagnosed with intranasal cancer behind her right eye.

"When they told us, it felt like our whole world just fell apart," said Rebecca.

The Davises took Mony to the Animal Cancer Care and Research Center, the veterinary college's state-of-the-art clinical and research facility in Roanoke, Virginia.

Petco Love helped pay for Mony's treatment. Petco Love, partnering with Blue Buffalo, grants the ACCRC funds every year to partially or fully cover costs for those who have difficulty affording cancer treatment for their pets.

Mony received treatment from veterinary radiation oncologist Ilektra Athanasiadi. As of January 2023, Mony is officially in remission.

"The ACCRC was wonderful," Rebecca said. "The people who worked there—oh my gosh, like family to us."



JENNIE & SPARKLES

Donkey duo return home after emergency treatment



“I was immediately impressed by communications from staff, from the initial intake at the front desk to the explanation of the course of action that the doctors thought necessary.

-Mark Whitt, owner of Sparkles & Jennie

After a multiple-day history of lethargy and lack of appetite and after treatment on the farm, Jennie, a 7-year-old donkey jenny, owned by the Maruca and Witt families from Leesburg, Virginia, was referred to the Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center (EMC) by Gabrielle Care, a veterinarian from Total Equine Veterinary Associates, Leesburg, for further diagnostics and treatment.

Mark Witt had collected two donkeys that needed a new home and one of the donkeys unbeknownst to him and his family had tetanus. That donkey sadly passed away the day after arriving at her new home.

Feeling the remaining donkey would need companionship, Witt found Jennie on a sheep farm in Staunton, Virginia. Jennie was introduced to her new pasture mate Gordon, who was immediately smitten, and the rest is history.

"While Gordon is very sociable and attention-seeking, Jennie is very quiet and super gentle," explained Witt.

Equines can be very tenacious despite their size, so it wasn't long before Jennie was expecting.

When Jennie and her 12-hour-old filly Sparkles arrived at the EMC, Sparkles was lying down in the trailer and was carried into the hospital. The filly was bright and responsive with a good suckle reflex and weighed in at a hefty 44 pounds.

Elizabeth MacDonald, clinical instructor of equine medicine, noted that Jennie was dull and lethargic but seemed to have no sign of obvious discomfort. MacDonald understood only too well that donkeys can be extremely stoic.

Diagnostic findings were consistent with hyperlipemia and hepatic lipidosis, a

condition caused by fat mobilization and fat accumulation in the liver and blood. Caused by decreased food intake, donkeys, ponies, and obese horses are prone to this condition along with pregnant and lactating mares and jennies.

Medical management and supportive care were initiated. Sparkles' bloodwork, checked when she was 18 hours old, indicated partial failure of passive transfer of immunity due to poor quality colostrum, inadequate colostrum intake, or poor absorption. Sparkles received a plasma transfusion to give the necessary immunoglobulins for protection, and she was started on systemic antibiotics.

Over the next few days, as Jennie and Sparkles' clinical signs improved, treatments gradually decreased and then discontinued. They were ready to go home!

2023 GIVING DAY

Supporting compassionate care in Virginia

Another Virginia Tech Giving Day has come and gone with an incredible wave of community support.

This year, the college stood behind our commitment of providing affordable veterinary care by putting all our efforts toward raising money for the compassionate care program, which offsets the cost of veterinary care for families who may not be able to afford care otherwise.

Seeing the need for more funding to help pets receive life-saving care at all three of our hospitals, Cynthia and John Hilson, Margie Lee, and James Dorsey and Linda Satterwhite stepped up to offer additional gifts as we hit donor participation milestones throughout the day for the Veterinary Teaching Hospital, Animal Cancer Care and Research Center, and the Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center, respectively.

As the day marched on, the number of donors grew larger. At 100, 200, and 300 donors, those larger gifts unlocked supporting compassionate care for the hospitals, resulting in a total of \$37,742 raised that will have an immediate impact on pet parents' lives.

To top it off, our final number of donors at the end of the 24 hours resulted in a \$100,000 gift from Michael and Jennifer Stanton supporting the expansion and renovation of the Veterinary Teaching Hospital, a project that facilitates our ability to continue to provide world-class, compassionate animal health care for years to come.



NUMBER OF DONORS: 453

DOLLARS RAISED: \$176,845

FUNDS RAISED FOR COMPASSIONATE CARE

**ANIMAL CANCER CARE
& RESEARCH CENTER: \$7,567**

**MARION DUPONT SCOTT
EQUINE MEDICAL CENTER: \$14,093**

**VETERINARY TEACHING
HOSPITAL: \$16,082**

HELPING OUT THE

Retiring to Australia, Hodgsons give \$1 million estate gift to scholarships

Future first-generation university students with demonstrated financial need, leadership qualities, and high academic standing after the first year of veterinary school will benefit from David and Jennie Hodgson's \$1 million estate gift in progressing toward a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree.

"We have developed very fulfilling relationships at Virginia Tech," said Jennie Hodgson, who is retiring this summer as professor of microbiology in the veterinary college's Department of Population Health Sciences. "We thought it could be an opportunity for both of us, who have been privileged enough to obtain our veterinary degrees at relatively limited cost, to give back to the college and to help someone who is a first-generation student in the veterinary program."

The Hodgsons have been at Virginia Tech since 2007, following 16 prior years at the University of Sydney in Australia. Both universities are getting scholarship funding from the Hodgsons' estate. The Hodgsons are returning to their home in the historic town of Camden, 40 miles southwest of Sydney.

"We've been able to travel the world because we're veterinarians," said David Hodgson, professor emeritus and former head of the Department of Large Animal Clinical Services at the veterinary college, retiring in 2018.



Opening a wide world of possibilities is what they hope the scholarship will do for future generations of veterinary students.

"A veterinary degree offers so many different job opportunities, whether it be in practice or in myriad other jobs that veterinarians undertake," Jennie Hodgson said. "And all of these contribute in such meaningful ways to our society, which makes it a really great profession to be in."

Memorial scholarship honors much-loved rural veterinarian, will assist veterinary students from rural areas



Doc Fuller's red truck rolled over hilly highways and dirt paths, hauling love for animals and people alike.

The Dr. Bill W. (Doc) Fuller Veterinary Scholarship has been established by Barbara Blevins and her husband, Marty, with an initial gift of \$100,000, in memory of Blevins' brother, a 1997 alum of the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine and a mixed-animal veterinarian based in Gate City, Virginia, who died in December at age 56.

Read more about the Doc Fuller memorial scholarship at: vetmed.vt.edu/tracks

Annual distributions will support third- and fourth-year veterinary students from rural parts of Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and West Virginia with financial need. First preference will go to students who are on the Food Animal Medicine track.

Donations can be made to the Fuller scholarship fund by writing a check to Virginia Tech Foundation, mailing it to VMCVM; 215 Duck Pond Drive; Blacksburg, VA 24061, with "Doc Fuller Scholarship" on the check memo line.

NEXT GENERATION

Something to be grateful for

At the Evening of Gratitude in March, donors were introduced to scholarship recipients, allowing them to hear how their support affects students' lives.

One such student was Gabriel Faulcon of the DVM class of 2026. Having grown up on his family's farm, Faulcon always knew he wanted to be a veterinarian. He is studying to become a veterinary epidemiologist.

"The incredible curriculum here at Virginia-Maryland has allowed me to personalize my education in ways that will better prepare me to serve our public health system through veterinary medicine," said Faulcon. Faulcon said the financial support of scholarships allows students to focus more on their studies.

As a professor, Roger Ramirez-Barrios sees the impact scholarships can have on students.

"Coming from a country where higher education is free, I can barely imagine all the pressure that students feel about their careers, so that's why I really appreciate all your help in student scholarship donations," said Ramirez-Barrios, clinical associate professor of veterinary parasitology, originally from Venezuela. "It's not a secret — the impact, students know, is on their physical and mental health. You need all the support that we can provide you, and scholarships are one of the good ways we can help you. However, for me, I truly believe that the support we can provide you has to go beyond scholarship."

Bernie Cosell said gratitude goes both ways.

Bernie and Lynn Cosell have been longtime supporters of the college, including supporting the new facility for dairy cows. In the 30 years since they started their sheep farm in Giles County, the Cosells have formed a tight bond with the Production Management Medicine team at the Veterinary Teaching Hospital.

The Cosells' farm has offered hands-on learning to students, and the Cosells have generously endowed a scholarship for large animal veterinary students. Lynn Cosell passed away in April.

"They took care of our sheep in a way you can't imagine — we have called them at 1 o'clock on a Sunday morning when a ewe was having trouble lambing, and we had a vet out at our farm by 2 a.m., helping us deal with it and bringing a few students," Bernie Cosell said.

"We wanted to give money back to the vet school because they have been so good to us and such an important part of our farm."



“There are many talented students like myself — a lot of them are in this room — who dream of earning an education from this university. Unfortunately, the reality is that we would not be able to be here without your support.”

- Gabriel Faulcon, DVM Class of 2026

Top (clockwise): Dean Dan Givens and scholarship recipients; Marion Ehrich, Roger Ehrich, and Peter Eyre; donors Desi Campbell and Barbara Byron talk with students; donor and speaker Bernie Cosell.

Bottom (clockwise): Donor Chris Meade (second from left) poses with scholarship recipients; VMCVM scholarship recipients; Dean Givens, Jennifer Hodgson, Sierra Guynn, and Roger Ramirez-Barrios, all faculty members of the college as well as donors.





AVIAN FLU: *Alumni leading the fight*

From personally escorting a sample on a flight from Virginia to Iowa for testing, to joining a delegation on a trans-Pacific flight to Japan to convince trading partners the U.S. poultry supply is safe, alumni from the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine (VMCVM) are on the front lines in the battle to control the impacts of the highly pathogenic avian influenza outbreak.

Fidelis Hegngi DVM '94, a senior staff veterinarian in the USDA who has been at work on national avian flu policy for almost two decades, said the '22-'23 event "is the largest highly pathogenic avian influenza outbreak ever recorded in the United States and arguably the most significant animal health event in U.S. history, ever."

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), spread by a strain of the H5N1 virus, has resulted in the deaths of nearly 59 million birds in the U.S. since the first case was discovered in February 2022, spread to the U.S. by migrating waterfowl.

After a handful of scattered confirmed cases in small flocks in 2021, Virginia saw its first confirmed case in this avian flu outbreak at a commercial turkey flock on Jan. 19 of this year in Rockingham County, followed by another case three miles to the southwest in a second commercial turkey farm eight days later. More than 36,000 birds were euthanized.

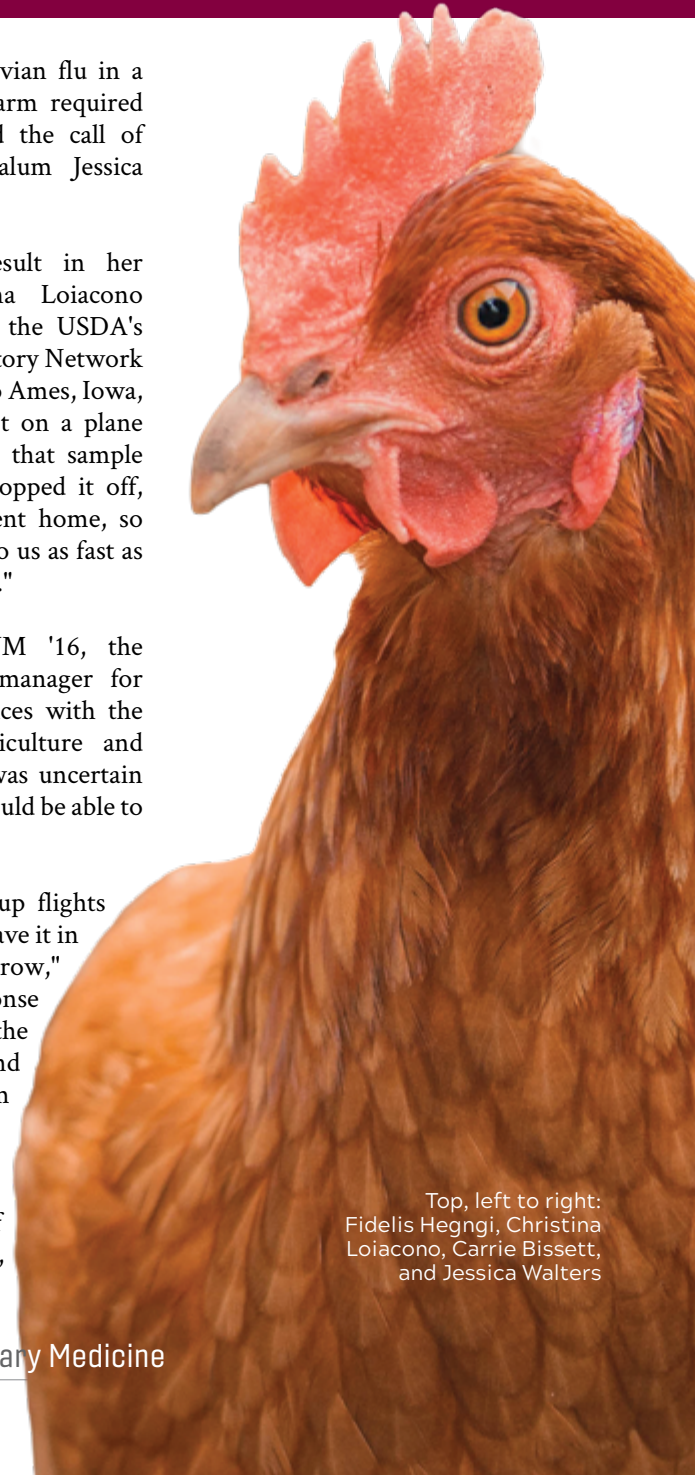
Confirming that first case of avian flu in a Virginia commercial poultry farm required some quick action far beyond the call of normal duty for VMCVM alum Jessica Walters.

"She had a non-negative result in her laboratory," recalled Christina Loiacono '90, DVM '94, coordinator of the USDA's National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN). "It needed to come to Ames, Iowa, for confirmation. Well, she got on a plane on a Sunday and hand-carried that sample to Ames, Iowa, for testing, dropped it off, got back on the plane and went home, so that they could get the sample to us as fast as possible to get the confirmation."

Walters '09, Ph.D. '14, DVM '16, the Harrisonburg-based program manager for the Office of Laboratory Services with the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Service (VDACS), was uncertain commercial delivery services would be able to get the sample to Iowa in time.

"I jokingly said, 'I'll just look up flights from Charlottesville and I can have it in Ames, Iowa, by 11 a.m. tomorrow,'" Walters recalled. "And the response I got was, 'Well, that might be the best option.' I called my husband and said, 'Well, it looks like I'm flying to Iowa in the morning.'"

Hegngi, originally from Cameroon, is the senior staff veterinarian for Aquaculture,



Top, left to right: Fidelis Hegngi, Christina Loiacono, Carrie Bissett, and Jessica Walters

Swine, Equine & Poultry (ASEP) Health Center strategy and policy with the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services.

Part of Hegngi's role is also to help assure trade partners that the U.S. poultry supply is safe and available, such as on a mid-February visit to Japan.

"They're taking me to Japan as the poultry expert, to be able to explain to Japan what is happening in the U.S. with the outbreak," Hegngi said. "So Japan can calm down and not be scared that they're not going to get poultry and poultry products from us, or that they can get product that might bring the disease to them."

Loiacono oversees an intricate network of laboratory facilities where animal samples are tested for a variety of diseases. The veterinary college has one of the labs in the network, Virginia Tech Animal Laboratory Services (ViTALS), overseen by Tanya LeRoith DVM '99.

"I get to work with directors in laboratories around the country and diagnosticians around the country," Loiacono said. "It's just great to be supporting the work that

they do, because they're doing all the hard work. I'm just trying to help keep all the wheels going in the same direction."

At a state level, it is Carrie Bissett DVM '04 who keeps the wheels rolling in unison, as incident commander for the response to the two cases in Virginia.

"I'm like the master chess player, moving people around and telling them what to do," Bissett said. "We've got about 30 responders, between my staff here at VDACS and the USDA, and a few federal contractors. That's the breadth of the response with what we're looking at right now with the commercial turkey detections that we're responding to currently."

The lab Walters oversees in Harrisonburg is a member of the national network supervised by Loiacono, who Walters describes as "my subject matter expert when it comes to testing requirements."

Walters also enjoys collegiality with fellow alum Bissett, based in Richmond, who is her counterpart in state agriculture and consumer services as a program manager of a different office.

"So basically, my laboratory testing is the foundation for the decisions that she makes," Walters said of Bissett. "And so we work very, very closely together."

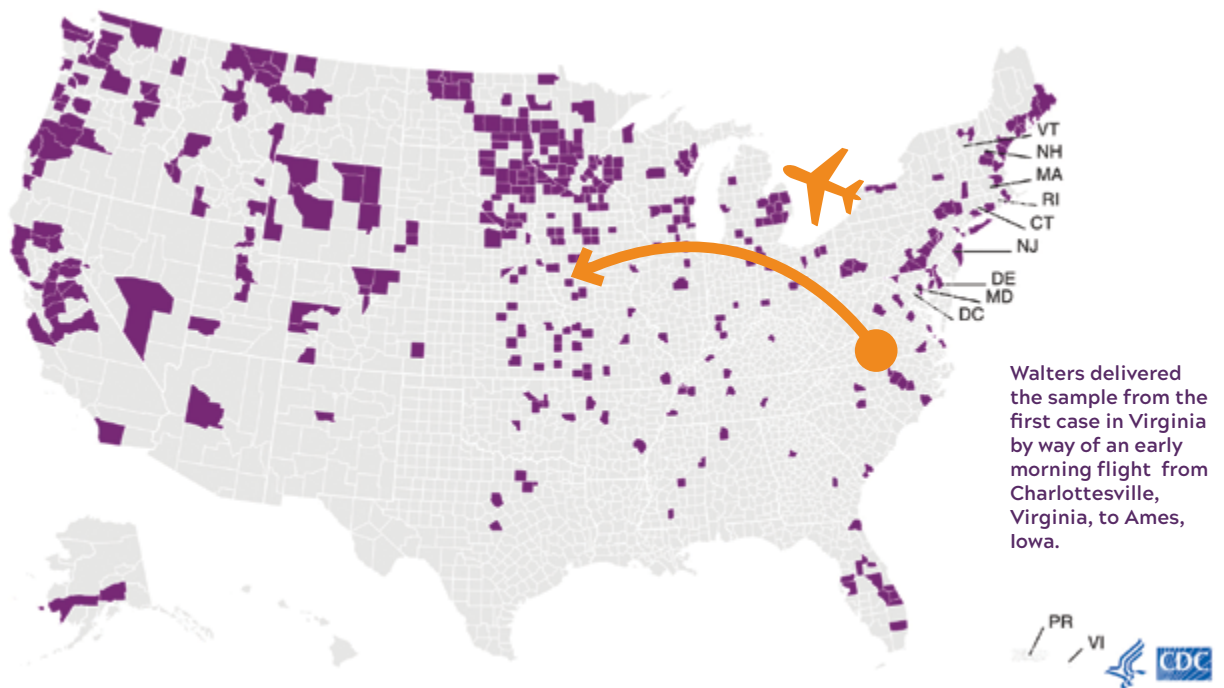
Common veterinary college ties can also help bridge the distance with Hgengi at the federal policy level, Walters said.

"I will say it is very nice to be able to go to someone like Fidel at meetings, even though he's much higher up in the USDA," Walters said. "Since he is a Virginia Tech alum, I feel a lot more comfortable being able to go have conversations with him because of that link."

Veterinarians trained in Blacksburg will continue making efforts to keep the food supply safe and whatever else it takes to keep the outbreak from worsening.

"The poultry industry is near and dear to my heart," Walters said. "And I will pretty much do whatever I need to do to protect it."

H5N1 BIRD FLU DETECTIONS ACROSS THE U.S. AS OF FEB. 22, 2023.





KENDALL TANEY

Alumna recognized as top expert in pet oral surgery

Adult humans can let everyone within earshot know how miserable they are when they get a toothache, but how must it be for an animal that cannot let anyone know?

Kendall Taney '97 DVM '02, owner of the Center for Veterinary Dentistry and Oral Surgery in Gaithersburg, Maryland, is now one of the most highly recognized experts in how to help those silently suffering animals.

In 2022, Taney finished a rigorous two-year training program and examination to become an American Veterinary Dental College Fellow in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery. Fewer than 20 veterinarians worldwide carry that distinction.

The American Veterinary Dentistry College had 14 founding fellows in oral and maxillofacial surgery, including Mark Smith, a retired former partner of Taney at the Maryland clinic and Taney's mentor. Smith, a professor of surgery and dentistry at VMCVM from 1988 to 2004, was impressed by Taney as a student and offered her a residency in 2005 even before she was sure she wanted to enter veterinary dentistry.

"Kendall completed general and surgery internships following graduation," recalled Smith, who now operates a consultants' practice in veterinary dentistry and oral surgery in South Carolina. "She aspired to be a board-certified surgeon for which I had written recommendations for her based on my interactions with her when she was a student. By chance, I met her in a hallway during a veterinary surgery meeting where she was interviewing for surgery residency programs. I let her know that if she ever changed her career goal, I could offer her a residency position in dentistry and oral surgery.

"Fortunately, she changed her mind, and the rest is history."

Taney was in the first group of four fellowship candidates to go through the qualification program and the first to complete all requirements for Fellow status. That program included keeping a case log with requirements to perform

certain complex surgeries, a research publication requirement and supervision by an existing Fellow.

Taney obtaining Fellow status was not a surprise to her longtime mentor.

"In my opinion, individuals in veterinary specialties that involve surgery must be decisive and confident," Smith said. "Kendall has these 'unteachable' qualities along with excellent technical skills and a compassionate nature regarding her patients. These attributes make her an exceptional veterinary dentist and oral surgeon."

Being able to communicate with clients is also important.

"It certainly isn't something you come out of veterinary school with," Taney said. "A lot of us go in because we love animals, and we forget about the humans that come with them. In a lot of these cases, owners are coming with patients that have something that's pretty serious, and they're very emotional. You have to be able to explain the condition that their pet has, and how you're going to help them."

Some of those discussions with clients are difficult, and bump up against the limits of what veterinary medicine and even an expert oral surgeon can do to help.

"I always tell people that we can do amazing things, which can be cutting-edge procedures, but sometimes there are points where we shouldn't do those procedures," Taney said. "Sometimes we have to say the best course of action is not to treat, if it's something we don't expect an outcome where the patient has a good quality of life."

Quality of life is not just a concern for ailing animals, but also for the professionals who treat them. Taney

shares many colleagues' concerns that some prospective veterinarians are being deterred from entering the field or choose to leave it because of burnout.

"There's just not enough dentists and specialists, and there's not enough veterinary staff to support them," Taney said. "It's not unique to our specialty, it's really across the board. The pandemic was extremely challenging for the veterinary world, the demand was just through the roof, and people got really tired. I think it's a matter of getting people back into having a good quality of life, number one, but also enjoying their jobs and wanting to be in this field."

But Taney has found a place that is fulfilling for her in the field.

"I like surgery a lot," Taney said. "I just like suturing. It's going to sound weird, but I just like the way the tissue in the mouth handles and I like teeth. I like reconstructing parts of the face. That's what really gets me going. You can fix things usually with one surgery. It's very mechanical.

"Fractures are one of my favorites. It's like taking a puzzle and trying to figure out how we're going to get it to come together."





THE EQUINE VETERINARY CRISIS

And a path forward for sustainable emergency and critical care

There is a crisis silently brewing in the equine veterinary world. The combination of older veterinarians leaving the field, current equine veterinarians leaving for better pay and work/life balance, and fewer numbers of veterinary students choosing equine as their elective field of specialty have seriously affected the availability of primary and emergency care for horses throughout the United States and beyond.

Michael Erskine '84 DVM '88, Jean Ellen Shehan Professor and director of the Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center (EMC) in Leesburg, Virginia, is part of a national commission looking into the problem. The EMC is one of three animal health care facilities of the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine.

"Equine veterinarians typically provide emergency care for their client's horses, but emergency coverage can be especially challenging, taking a huge toll on equine practitioners who are often expected to be available 24/7," said Erskine. "Equine referral hospitals, unlike small animal emergency clinics, are few and far between with horse owners often having to travel substantial distances to seek comprehensive emergency care."

Research by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) discovered that only about 5 percent of veterinary students choose to pursue a career in equine veterinary medicine. Within five years, about 50 percent of these equine-focused veterinarians will move to small animal practice or decide to leave their aspirations for a career as a veterinarian behind altogether.

One major area of concern for new college graduates is compensation. Graduates who choose to focus on small animals can expect to step into a six-figure salary soon after graduation. In comparison, equine-focused graduates may choose to go into private practice or further their education by seeking an internship, possibly followed by a residency, but can expect to earn much less than their small animal counterparts during the first several years of their careers.

Work/life balance is another factor impacting the retention of equine veterinarians. The expectation of 24-hour access to emergency care on the farm, 365 days per year, is no longer sustainable for many practices.

The EMC has seen a substantial increase in emergency and critical care cases in recent years. In fiscal year 2022, emergency cases increased 21.5 percent over the previous year, amounting to 739 emergency cases treated during the 12 months.

"To sustain emergency services at the EMC we are planning to create a dedicated Emergency and Critical Care Team," Erskine said. "This team will be focused around specially trained equine clinicians who have completed advanced training in both emergency medicine and surgery."

EMC clinician Emily Schaefer, clinical assistant professor of internal medicine, will complete a fellowship in equine emergency and critical care in the summer of 2023. EMC Advisory Council Vice Chair Shelley Duke and her husband, Phil, made this fellowship possible through their generous sponsorship.

The fellowship, a unique collaboration with The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine, spanned three years and will culminate in Schaefer being board-certified by the American College of Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care. Schaefer will fill one of two new faculty positions generated by the introduction of this new progressive program alongside Sarah Dukti, clinical assistant professor of emergency and critical care, who joined the EMC in March 2023.

The introduction of this dedicated team will allow clinicians to focus on outpatient appointments and elective surgeries, mitigating sometimes lengthy wait times for these services.

A generous and committed supporter of EMC shared her desire for all equine-focused veterinarians to have a sustainable work-life balance. Her passion encouraged her and her husband to commit support for the initial three-year bridge funding of \$1.5 million to stand up the service, which is expected to be self-sustaining by the end of the three-year term.

"I am so proud of the work EMC has done to reimagine this context, and of the courage Mike Erskine and his team have shown in their willingness to lead the way to make emergency medicine the exciting career choice it should be."

RIDE SAFE, PROTECT YOUR HEAD

Helmet safety awareness event at EMC



Brain displacement of five to seven millimeters – the width of three nickels – can result in impaired brain function, possibly leading to loss of consciousness and/or a concussion.

Stefan Duma, the Harry C. Wyatt Professor of Engineering, director of the Institute for Critical Technology and Applied Sciences and co-founder of the Virginia Tech Helmet Lab, emphasized the importance of protecting the human head as he talked about research findings on horse riders' helmets at a recent event at the Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center (EMC) in Leesburg, Virginia.

Equestrian sports-related injuries account for 50,000 trips to the emergency room each year – more than any other sport in America.

"We here at the medical center not only care about our equine patients, we also care about the people associated with them, and that's why it's a privilege for us to have Stefan to talk to you about some of the research involving helmets and equestrian sports," Dan Givens, dean of the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, said in introducing Duma.

The Virginia Tech Helmet Lab recently published results from a study on equestrian helmet ratings. Forty equestrian helmets were rated using the Helmet Lab's STAR evaluation system.

The study was made possible with support from equestrian enthusiast and philanthropist Jacqueline Mars and three national equestrian foundations: The U.S. Hunter Jumper Association, the U.S. Equestrian Federation, and the U.S. Eventing Association, who collectively raised more than \$425,000 in research funds.

Duma said the Helmet Lab's next project would focus on equestrian vests, both regular and inflatable, studying effects on the head, neck, and thorax, the latter being a "wild, wild West" when it comes to similar research, Duma said.

"Thank you for allowing us to gather a very special group of equine enthusiasts and leaders in the field," Givens said. "As key influencers in the community, you can help raise awareness and improve rider safety with the latest information on helmet ratings and recommendations."



"We created this STAR system; what STAR stands for is the summation of tested analysis of risk. If you're going to buy a helmet, you're not going to look at 30 charts or 25 scatter plots and try to sort out what time it was best in what condition to what acceleration. So, we created this equation, which combines all of that. We can do hundreds of laboratory tests, submit everything in the one value. That gives you a single point of how well a helmet performs and you can compare that to other helmets. That's the STAR system."

- Stefan Duma, co-founder, Helmet Lab



Top: Jennifer Barrett (center) and EMC Advisory Council Member Steffanie Burgevin (right) get up close and personal with a selection of Stefan Duma's (left) sport safety helmets.

Bottom: Betsy Manierre tries a Duma-approved riding helmet on for size.



"A GAME CHANGER" <<

New table transforms large animal exams at veterinary teaching hospital

You can lead a horse to water, but you can't get one easily into a CT scanner.

Until recently, clinicians at the Veterinary Teaching Hospital (VTH) couldn't use CT, or computed tomography, for large animals. But the recent purchase of an \$85,000 table for large animals that can be wheeled to the CT scanner now allows for that option, particularly useful for studying conditions inside the heads of equine animals.

"We commonly use the CT scanner for imaging dogs and cats," said Gregory Daniel, professor of radiology in the Department of Small Animal Clinical Sciences. "The current CT scanner works great for small animals, but most scanners have a 450-pound table limit. For most people and certainly for all small animals, that is sufficient. But if you've got a 1,000-pound patient, then a traditional CT scanner cannot accommodate that."

Now, a horse or other large animal can be anesthetized, laid upon the table, and rolled to the CT scanner. The table is electronically synced with the scanner, allowing it to capture slice-by-slice imagery of a large animal's skull, teeth, and cranial cavities, providing much more detail than X-ray radiographs can reveal.

"When you look at the radiograph of a horse skull, it's a two-dimensional image of a three-dimensional object," Daniel said. "A radiograph is composed of shadows from multiple overlying structures, superimposed over each other. When you've got a complex anatomy with a lot of overlying bones and cavities, a radiograph can be challenging to interpret."

VTH in Blacksburg will now be the only veterinary hospital offering the capability to employ CT scans for large animals in a radius extending roughly 240 miles, to as far away as North Carolina State's

veterinary college in Raleigh and to the college's own Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center (EMC) in Leesburg, where there is a CT scanner that allows equine animals to stand during the exam. "We have referred some of these cases to the EMC because we needed the additional information and that was the best thing for the patient," said Chris Byron, head of the Department of Large Animal Clinical Sciences. "If they're coming from southern Virginia or North Carolina to us, it's a big ask to send them another three and a half to four hours north."

Byron and Daniel both describe the acquisition of the CT scanner table for large animals as a "game-changer." Combined with MRI technology that does well with ligaments and cartilage of large animals' legs and feet, plus existing radiograph and ultrasound abilities, veterinary clinicians at VTH can cover much more of a large animal's body in examinations.



UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES:

Mid-Atlantic workshop highlights value of T32 research training program

The scientific community needs more veterinarian scientists for biomedical research. A federal grant program administered at Virginia Tech is helping fulfill that need.

The National Research Service Award Institutional Research Training Grant, more commonly called a T32 grant, offered by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), helps fund veterinarians who pursue a Ph.D. and become leaders in biomedical research with the guidance of an experienced mentor.

Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine (VMCVM) is one of only 15 veterinary schools in the country receiving T32 grants from NIH.

In March, VMCVM hosted a first-of-its-kind Mid-Atlantic regional workshop, bringing together NIH T32 training grant trainees, directors, and mentors from Wake Forest University, Johns Hopkins University and Virginia Tech.

T32 trainees from the three universities made short presentations on their ongoing research.

"It was wonderful getting to see the true diversity in research topics that a veterinary degree can prepare you for,"

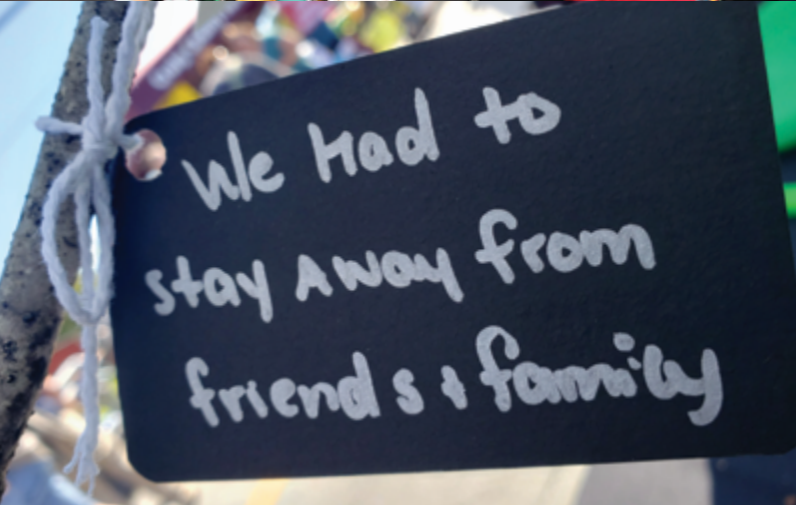
“Veterinarians are uniquely qualified for conducting cutting-edge biomedical research, especially in the area of comparative medicine.”

said Mitchell Caudill, a veterinarian and Ph.D. candidate at VMCVM who presented on his brucellosis research.

"Additionally, many of us have an interest in becoming faculty and are starting an informal group to work to build grant-writing skills, which is an unexpected and exciting outcome from the workshop."

X.J. Meng, University Distinguished Professor of molecular virology at VMCVM and professor of internal medicine at VTC School of Medicine, is the program director of the Virginia Tech T32 training grant. S. Ansar Ahmed, associate dean for research and graduate studies at the veterinary college, is the program's co-director. Twenty-two faculty mentors from six different Virginia Tech colleges participate in the T32 program.

"Currently there is a critical shortage of veterinarians with a strong biomedical research background across the country," said Meng. "But veterinarians are uniquely qualified for conducting cutting-edge biomedical research, especially in the area of comparative medicine."



Rural residents share stories of resilience during pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic hit rural communities hard: isolation and financial strain have been major challenges for people living in rural areas. Through participating in a story tree, residents of Craig County, Virginia, reflected on their experiences and told the story of how their community has persevered.

Craig County is a rural county of approximately 5,000 people, located just northwest of Blacksburg. During the Craig County Fall Festival in October 2022, Sophie Wenzel, assistant professor of practice and associate director of the Center for Public Health Practice and Research, facilitated the creation of a community story tree alongside master's of public health (MPH) students Natalie Martin, Molly Kwitny, and Alison Toler. The project was part of the Extension Collaboration on Immunization Teaching and Engagement (EXCITE) project, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and United States Department of Agriculture through the Extension Foundation.

"It was a chance to let people stop and talk and reflect about the COVID pandemic, because life just resumed so quickly once there were no more mask mandates, once people were vaccinated, and we never just stopped to talk about what happened," said Wenzel.

The story tree was created using note cards, pens, string, and tree branches. Craig County residents reflected on their experiences during the pandemic by sharing their thoughts on note cards, which were then placed on the branches, representing the leaves of the tree. There, Craig County residents could read and learn from their neighbors' stories.

Over 100 people participated in the story tree, sharing a range of experiences from stories of loss of loved ones to community resilience to children's stories of the pandemic's impact on education. As more stories were added to the tree, more people became interested in sharing their perspectives.

"Some people just wanted to talk. They wanted to share stories of their community, they wanted to share their personal stories of how the pandemic affected them. I remember one person sharing a story about their community coming together and really helping each other out – lots of stories of hope like that," said Wenzel.

Wenzel stressed the importance of slowing down to reflect. By taking a pause, the residents of Craig County acknowledged the way the pandemic affected their lives and highlighted what they learned from the experience.

A story tree is a simple, accessible way to hear a community's stories, gather information, and start a dialogue.

"It's a way for people to feel connected, and it ends up looking beautiful in the end."

PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST

Ramirez-Barrios' empathy-driven approach to education



Roger Ramirez-Barrios has quickly made an impact at the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, undoubtedly a lasting one in the lives of his students.

Arriving at Virginia Tech three years ago as clinical associate professor of veterinary parasitology, the 2022-23 school year has been a big one for Ramirez-Barrios, being named the Virginia Veterinary Medical Association's Mentor of the Year for 2023 while also serving as advisor for the new PrideSVMC chapter at the veterinary college.

"For me, being a professor is not standing in front of a classroom repeating what the slide says — it's more than that," Ramirez-Barrios said. "Every time that I enter a classroom and I see all the students, I don't just see students who need to learn. I see faces, I see human beings, and I know that behind those faces are dreams, goals, fears, insecurities."

Empathy is at the core of Ramirez-Barrios's mentorship philosophy. He is upfront with students about his own insecurities and imperfections, and in showing his humanity, he's able to connect with them. Any are welcome to come to him for guidance at any time.

"Certainly, I won't have all the tools they will need to succeed. But most of the time, they just need someone to listen without judgment," he said.

Ramirez-Barrios' concern for students' struggles and not being judged led him to serving as advisor for PrideSVMC, the student arm of PrideVMC, a national organization of LGBTQ+ veterinary professionals.

Ramirez-Barrios was the speaker at the first meeting of the chapter's probationary period. He expected only a handful of students to attend.

"Instead, the classroom was full. I really enjoyed that conversation because it was very honest, and I tried to show them that all of us can have some insecurities, but in the end, we are the same community, and we have to feel accepted and valued," said Ramirez-Barrios. "I've been there. I've been in the place where you don't feel appreciated, you don't feel accepted, you don't feel valued. And I want to avoid that with my students."

Ramirez-Barrios received his DVM and an M.S. in teaching in higher education in Venezuela before obtaining a Ph.D. in animal medicine and health at the University de Cordoba in Spain. He came to the U.S. in 2017, serving as postdoctoral associate at the University of Minnesota-Duluth Medical School and assistant professor in biology at St. Michael's College in Vermont before coming to Virginia Tech in 2020.

But to Ramirez-Barrios, his academic and veterinary accomplishments pale beside the responsibility of mentoring the next generation.

"I don't want them to only succeed in vet school or in undergrad," Ramirez-Barrios said. "I want them to succeed in life. It's not that we are educating veterinarians, we are educating human beings. I want them to be very good human beings and excellent veterinarians as well. That's why I have to make time for them."



BEYOND THE SCRUBS

Terry Wnorowski's role as mentor and tech liaison

Terry Wnorowski is spending the last years of her career sparking new beginnings for others. For 30 years, she has worked as a licensed veterinary technician at the Veterinary Teaching Hospital (VTH) at the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine.

From working in anesthesia, serving as one of the VTH's first floaters, and specializing in ophthalmology for a decade each, Wnorowski has seen it all – even anesthetizing a Siberian tiger.

Now, in her last two years, she has taken on a new role at the teaching hospital: Onboarding and Training Coordinator and Tech Liaison. Her goal is to inspire and guide new veterinary technicians to have successful careers, just like she did.

Having witnessed the evolving landscape of veterinary medicine over the years, Wnorowski is aware of the challenges that the industry faces, particularly the shortage of veterinary technicians. She is determined to be part of the solution by focusing on education and support for current and aspiring veterinary technicians.

Wnorowski is developing relationships with area technical and community colleges to reinvigorate veterinary technician externships, providing future technicians hands-on experience and easing the strain on the veterinary hospital team.

However, the most exciting part of her new role is educating young people about the field of veterinary technology. She actively engages with high school students, introducing them to the field, answering their questions, and highlighting the unique opportunity of having a veterinary college in their local area. "There are only 32 vet schools in the entire U.S.," she said. "So how incredibly lucky are we to have one right here in our little valley?"

According to Wnorowski, one of the biggest contributors to the technician shortage is the lack of awareness of the field. She described how many of the high school students were passionate about working with animals but didn't realize just how many career pathways were available, especially in veterinary technology.

"Being a veterinary technician is a fantastic career with a lot of opportunities. There's so many cool things you can do."

Wnorowski has one piece of advice for aspiring technicians, that she wished she had listened to back in 1987: "Pay attention to your core and your back. Do core exercises when you're 20 so that you can still be lifting bulldogs when you're 70."



CHRIS BYRON, DVM, MS, DACVS

Chris Byron, associate professor and head of the Department of Large Animal Clinical Sciences, has been named the **C.R. Roberts Professor of Clinical Veterinary Medicine**. Byron joined the veterinary college in 2014 after completing an equine surgery residency and becoming board certified in veterinary surgery, working in both academia and private practice as an equine surgeon prior to coming to Virginia Tech.



AUDREY RUPLE, DVM, MS, PHD, DACVPM, MRCVS

Audrey Ruple, associate professor of quantitative epidemiology in the Department of Population Health Sciences, has been named the **Dorothy A. and Richard G. Metcalf Professor of Veterinary Medical Informatics**. Ruple, who joined the college in 2021, is the co-principal investigator and member of the executive operations team of the Dog Aging Project, the largest prospective project on animal health ever undertaken.



MARTHA LARSON, DVM, MS, DACVR

Martha Larson, professor of radiology, has been conferred the title of **professor emerita** by the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors. A member of the Virginia Tech community since 1986, Larson was the principal or co-principal investigator on 33 grants researching all imaging modalities and characteristic changes related to specific diseases, and the author or co-author on more than 70 peer-reviewed journal articles and 24 book chapters.





TEACHING THE TEACHERS

Veterinary instructors from Uganda, Kenya learn from - and teach - their peers at Virginia Tech

Veterinary instructors from Uganda and Kenya visited the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine (VMCVM) for a week in October to learn about methods and approaches they can apply to teaching veterinary students in their universities.

At Virginia Tech, the four visiting instructors observed and participated in OSCEs – objective structured clinical examinations, in which students are graded on the performance of clinical skills.

"One thing I've learned here is that all skills, whether clinical or biological, can be taught and be examined by using simulations rather than live animals," said

Robert Ssenfuma of Makerere University in Uganda. "Such simulations that are used here are very cheap and can also be used to train our students."

The African instructors were taken with, alternately, the variety and specialization of student training at the veterinary college.

"The way the curriculum is structured, the holistic approach in the training of students, there is no breaking down of the disciplines. No discipline stays on its own, and there is interconnection between the disciplines," said Francis Mutebi of Makerere University.

Irene Thiguku Kamanja of Egerton

University in Kenya was interested in how students could choose a specialty even within the interdisciplinary approach.

"We have five years to learn everything, do everything, no specialization," Kamanja said.

Jennie Hodgson, professor of microbiology in population health sciences, said VMCVM faculty also learned from their African counterparts.


"The needs of their countries for veterinary services are quite different from those here, but it made us reflect on our own day-one graduate competencies and whether we have these expectations right."

Katie Rodarte: Public/Corporate Track

From biosecurity to veterinary medicine: Meet Katie Rodarte, a nontraditional student with a unique background who is joining the DVM Class of 2027 this August.

Katie has worked in epidemiological disease monitoring and collaborated with veterinarians around the world at Los Alamos National Laboratory. With a passion for public and corporate veterinary medicine, she was drawn to the college's public/corporate track.

Katie's first veterinary experience was as a kennel assistant for Smith Veterinary Hospital in Santa Fe, which worked on the original Smokey Bear. Despite the many life hurdles, Katie never gave up on her dream of becoming a veterinarian and believes that her life experiences have helped prepare her for this next chapter.

A portrait of Katie Rodarte, a young woman with long, wavy brown hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a light-colored cardigan over a dark top. The background is a blurred indoor setting with large windows.


"I know most people say that but I am most proud that I stayed passionate about my goal despite the many life hurdles along the way. I am not afraid to let my age get in the way."

Michael Marciano: Food Animal Track

Michael Anthony Marciano, a pre-veterinary dairy science graduate at Virginia Tech, has been accepted into the DVM Class of 2027.

Michael discovered his passion for veterinary medicine after working at small animal clinics, local large animal practices, and farms, where he witnessed the hard work and dedication of farmers towards their animals.

His interest in farrier work started when he shadowed Dr. Tom Massie, who recommended he reach out to Travis Burns for further education. Burns has been instrumental in Michael's education, providing him with numerous learning and involvement opportunities throughout his time as an undergrad.

A portrait of Michael Marciano, a young man with short brown hair, smiling. He is wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored collared shirt. The background is a blurred indoor setting with warm lighting.

"Seeing the kinds of people that agriculture produces and the effort they'll put into what they do makes me want to work harder."

GLASS
OF
2027
SPOTLIGHTS

Adriana Fratz: Valedictorian

Adriana Fratz, a dual Doctor of Veterinary Medicine and Master of Public Health student, is the valedictorian of college's Class of 2023.

"Going to vet school here, I've had the opportunity to balance a lot of different interests and to explore so many different areas of veterinary medicine."

As a capstone project in public health, Fratz traveled to Mozambique examining ivermectin's use in malaria control. She has also completed externships at the Bronx Zoo and the Columbia School of Medicine's Institute of Comparative Medicine. In Virginia, she has worked on bat ecology, rabies, and tick-borne disease research.

Fratz plans on working in disease surveillance with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations for the summer before joining a small animal practice in New York.

Stephanie Valencic: Outstanding Senior

In addition to the bachelor's in public health program, Stephanie Valencic is a member of the Corps of Cadets and has enrolled in the accelerated master's of public health program.

Valencic entered the university as a biology major, but she was introduced to public health when she took an elective class in medical geography during her first year.

"I've always been fascinated by all the things we don't know, and ever since I was young, I wanted to help people. My main passion is helping people. Looking at public health, I was like, 'This is the perfect route! I can do pretty much anything,'" said Valencic.

CLASSES OF 2023 SPOTLIGHTS



"Ten-year-old me, raising pigs on my family's farm, would not have thought that I would one day be in Mozambique learning about pig husbandry."



"Finding public health, I really found myself, my purpose, what I'm passionate about."

VETERINARY TEACHING HOSPITAL
STEPHANIE VALENCIC
VITALS

A LETTER FROM CATHY SANTOS

As a third-year student in the small animal track program at Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, I am honored to serve as the president of the Student American Veterinary Medical Association (SAVMA). In this role, I have gained valuable leadership and networking experience, which has helped me contribute to the development of our student community.

Working with exceptional student leaders, we organized noteworthy events this year, such as the VMCVM Club Fair, the VMCVM Talent Show, and Fall Festival. In the Spring semester, we raised nearly \$10,000 for the Veterinary Teaching Hospital Compassionate Care and Wildlife Care funds during our annual Casino Night, and we assist clubs in organizing their events and booths for the college's Annual Open House.

As the SAVMA president, I take pride in our community's efforts to inspire students to make a positive impact in the field of veterinary medicine. We encourage students to engage in extracurricular activities, providing them with opportunities to expand their knowledge, enhance their skills, and grow both personally and professionally.

We are committed to continuing to serve our community and inspire students to become leaders in the veterinary profession.



Left: Joyce Hong supporting the SAVMA Fall Festival. Right: Ana Ryan performing in the VMCVM Talent Show.



Above: Daniel Fields (left) and Katie Green (right) representing the college at the SAVMA Annual Conference.

Bottom Right: Skylar Merkle (left) and Cathy Santos (right) at the SAVMA Annual Conference.

DVM students represent well at SAVMA Annual Conference at the University of Illinois

Last March, the VMCVM Student American Veterinary Medical Association attended the SAVMA Symposium in Champaign, Illinois, with several students representing the college. This event brought together SAVMA presidents, national delegates, and the bovine palpation team.

The presidents focused on running local chapters efficiently and exchanging ideas with SAVMA presidents from around the world, while the national delegates attended the meetings with student leaders from other AVMA accredited schools, voted on making inclusive changes to the national SAVMA constitutional bylaws, and discussed policies with AVMA advisors.

The bovine palpation team participated in a three-part competition and secured a spot in the top 5 among 11 other teams. Congratulations to the VMCVM Bovine Palpation team, and we look forward to sending more students to the SAVMA Symposium 2024 at the University of Tennessee!





CREATING COMMUNITY & EMPOWERING CHANGE

Three new student organizations have formed at the college, expressing and supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion.



Latinx Veterinary Medical Association

"The LVMA was created to help our community get together, celebrate, and highlight Latinx/Hispanic culture," said chapter president Gabriela Miranda-Rivera.

The chapter wants to increase visibility of the Latinx/Hispanic community in veterinary medicine. LVMA organized Hispanic Heritage Month events and a Día de los Muertos display in the college's commons. The chapter also connect students with scholarships for Latinx/Hispanic students.



PrideSVMC

LGBTQ+ students at the veterinary college have created a place for community and camaraderie. PrideSVMC is the student arm of PrideVMC, a national organization of LGBTQ+ veterinary professionals.

“After a long day of trying to fit the mold, we can come into these spaces and be with our people. Here you can be different, and we love it. Be who you are – this is your space.”

-Marquis Harper, co-founder of PrideSVMC

Since veterinary students are professional students, it can be difficult to connect with other graduate students, who are often studying for master's degrees or Ph.D.s. Thus, it's important that LGBTQ+ veterinary students have their own space.

Chapter leaders emphasized that the organization is a welcoming place for all. It offers a way for students in different graduating classes to connect with each other, and the chapter's existence lets incoming or potential students know that they can find community at the college.



National Association of Black Veterinarians

The newest chapter of the National Association of Black Veterinarians, the 13th established nationally, works to provide education and promote inclusion within an overwhelmingly white field.

The chapter hosts events for fundraising and community-building. Members plan on visiting local schools and working with minority veterinarians to provide mentorship opportunities for students.

Read more about each of these student organizations online at vetmed.vt.edu/tracks.





HORSESHOES & HEDGEHOGS:

Fun for all ages at veterinary college Open House

"This is SO cool!" The exclamation by a young girl with a feline-painted face was a sentiment repeated in various ways by many of the hundreds who attended the annual Open House at the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine on Saturday, April 15.

Dog handlers guided various breeds through a course of hoops, tubes and poles on what is normally the outdoor equine track as the "plink, plink, plink" of the horseshoe maker's hammer rang in the background from the nearby Farrier's Shed.

In an adjacent pen, horses Lola and Jasmine were painted on their hides with a skeleton and gastrointestinal tract display, respectively, as students Drew Myers and Elena Mantis gave

passersby a quick lesson on equine anatomy, with particular emphasis on a horse's huge colon.

Deep in the bowels of the building, in Classroom 129, exotic animals such as tarantulas, snakes, and hedgehogs were on hand – quite literally, being held by visitors.

Open House offers the public an opportunity to learn more about animal and human health, interact with veterinary students and faculty, and experience the college's state-of-the-art facilities. The event is also an opportunity for the college to showcase its educational programs to prospective students and donors. Moreover, the event is an excellent chance for families to have fun and learn together through various family-friendly activities.



“Open House serves as a wonderful opportunity for us to educate the public about the importance of animal and human health and showcase the many outstanding programs we have to offer.

-Dean Dan Givens





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