Celebrity Horse Receives Five-Star Treatment

When Padré the Mustang experienced a traumatic injury and suffered from mysterious swelling in his hind leg early in the summer of 2012, his owner did what any concerned horse parent would do. She sought the best diagnostics and top-notch care for her boy.

But while there may be nothing unusual in a horse making the trip to the UW Veterinary Care Teaching Hospital, Padré and his owner, Patti Gruber, are not exactly your typical horse and rider. They are dressage champions. In fact, Padré is the first wild horse to compete at Dressage at Devon, the most prestigious dressage competition in the United States. You may even recognize Padré from his Breyer horse, a model horse made in his likeness.

Padré’s injury, however, was not that unusual. Like many horses, the swelling in his leg could have been caused by a number of problems, including serious issues like a torn vessel or fracture. In order to determine the cause of the problem, Sabrina Brounts, a professor of large animal surgery at the UW School of Veterinary Medicine, used diagnostic imaging to get a better look at the injury.

“We did an ultrasound, and that’s when we found the blood in the joint,” said Brounts. This condition, known as hemarthrosis, caused the joint to swell with the extra fluid. Luckily for Padré, the radiographs and ultrasound images showed that he did not suffer cartilage damage or bone fractures.

“There was no major damage, so that was a positive,” said Brounts.

However, complications from the injury required Padré to settle in for a stay at the hospital. For owner Patti Gruber, letting her boy out of her sight was difficult. “It was obviously a huge concern of mine to have Padré’s care out of my hands,” said Gruber. “But Dr. Brounts quickly put me at ease and kept me in the loop about how he was doing.”

During his week-long stay, the staff and students at the teaching hospital even treated Padré to some of the exotic snacks that he is accustomed to at home. “Padré is deservingly pampered,” said Gruber. “I ask a lot of him from our training program and show schedule, and I treat him well for giving me 100 percent all of the time.” Beyond being a dressage champion, Padré’s demanding schedule involves guest appearances at venues like the Midwest Horse Fair, where he will appear in April 2013, and the Volo Auto Museum Mustang Car Show, where he is a crowd favorite.

Some of Padré’s favorite treats include the classic carrots and apples, as well as bananas, apricots, watermelon, papaya, and granola bars, which he continued to receive during his stay at the teaching hospital. “I could not have asked for a better experience with the excellent care and concern we received during the difficult stay,” said Gruber. “[Surgery resident] Dr. Wimer even gave Padré a granola bar from her own lunch when my supply ran out.”

According to Brounts, the hospital stay was just what the doctor ordered. With rest, the swelling reduced dramatically, and Padré was allowed to return home to his devoted owner. And while the injury in his hind leg is still healing steadily, it did lead to secondary complications with some of the ligaments in his back. In response, Brounts prescribed pain medication, muscle relaxants, acupuncture, and a strict physical therapy regimen to strengthen his back and hind leg.

“He gets more exercise now,” said Brounts. “He can hopefully go back to being a Breyer horse and being a real dressage horse soon.” In fact, while Padré’s busy life as a major equine celebrity had to be put on hold during his recovery, his schedule is already booking up again.

“Padré has such a tremendous ability to charm people who never thought much of Mustangs,” said Gruber. “He is the famous one, and I am lucky to walk beside him, ride atop him, or even clean up after him.”

Ali Bartol
Young Earns ASVCP Educator Award

Karen Young, clinical professor of clinical pathology, received the 2012 Educator Award from the American Society for Veterinary Clinical Pathology (ASVCP).

Each year the ASVCP recognizes a member for outstanding contributions to the education of future veterinarians and pathologists, including veterinary medical students, clinical pathology residents, veterinarians, and laboratory professionals.

“Dr. Young is the quintessential teacher,” says Kristen Friedrichs, clinical assistant professor of clinical pathology at the SVM. “She is a teacher of students, a teacher of teachers, and a visionary leader in the arena of veterinary medical education.”

Academic Excellence

Findings from the Academic Analytics 2010 Database (AAD 2010) released in June show that the Comparative Biomedical Sciences (CBMS) graduate program at the UW School of Veterinary Medicine is a top-ranked program. Both locally and on the national level, the program received top scores.

Academic Analytics gathers and aggregates metrics on the research productivity of nearly 400 institutions nationally into a comparative database. AAD 2010 includes data in categories such as grant dollars earned, number of books or articles published by faculty, and number of faculty with awards or honors. The goal is to provide clear, unbiased information that each graduate program can use for easy comparison and to evaluate their own performance by observing strengths and areas for improvement in the individual categories.

Based on this information, the CBMS graduate program received the top score of all the programs on the UW–Madison campus. Nationally, the program also excelled, ranking among the leading veterinary graduate programs in the country.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

The View After Six Months

As the new dean of the School of Veterinary Medicine, it is my pleasure to welcome you to this issue of On Call. It’s hard to believe that it has already been six months since I was appointed dean. I would like to give you a brief update on some of the new initiatives and changes that we have implemented in that time, which are described in greater detail in this issue.

We have recently hired or are in the process of hiring six new faculty in a variety of departments and specialties. This effort is bolstered with central campus support for new faculty positions and an enhanced funding model, tentatively approved by campus, that will significantly improve the school’s funding as we go forward. On the administrative side, we have filled three positions—chief financial officer, associate dean for advancement and administration, and associate director of development—with excellent candidates.

I would also like to draw your attention to our Comparative Biomedical Sciences graduate program and its outstanding academic ranking, as described in the article “Academic Excellence.” The strength of our graduate degree program is due in no small part to our outstanding faculty and to the exceptional graduate students that we are able to recruit and train.

As many know, we recently celebrated “100 years of veterinary sciences” on the UW–Madison campus; and throughout the past century, the Comparative Biomedical Sciences program and its predecessor, the Department of Veterinary Sciences, have led the campus in advancing animal and human health. Many graduates and faculty have served as national and global leaders in research. Another small measure of the impact of this program on veterinary medicine is the fact that seven of our alumni have served as deans of schools of veterinary medicine in North America.

I hope you have had a chance to visit our website lately as our new and enhanced School of Veterinary Medicine and UW Veterinary Care websites have been launched. We have posted introductory videos for many of the school’s principal areas of focus. I hope you find our site welcoming and informative and return to look for more improvements in the coming months.

Last but not least, I would like to invite you to our upcoming open house on April 7, 2013, where we will highlight many of our programs both within the school and UW Veterinary Care. All are welcome, and we look forward to seeing you.

In summary, as I tell everyone in the school, my door is always open, and I welcome any suggestions or questions you may have with regard to the school and its impact on veterinary medical education, research, and clinical service.

Mark D. Markel
Dean
Competitive Riding Leads Student to Equine Medicine

Much of Lauren Zappitelli’s time is spent either learning how to care for horses or riding them. For a veterinary medical student who focuses on equine care, this isn’t all that unusual. But it’s how Zappitelli rides, and where, that sets her apart.

Rather than cantering casually through the back 40, Zappitelli straps on boots, breeches, and a helmet and soars over the fences and ditches of show jumping courses. Or she guides her mount through the intricate movements of dressage, an athletic pursuit dating back to the Renaissance.

“It’s a great stress relief, and it’s nice being outside and doing something active,” says Zappitelli, a third-year student in the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine program at the UW School of Veterinary Medicine. “Jumping over obstacles is a real adrenaline rush.”

She does this all under the scrutiny of judges in international venues, and she does it extremely well. At the World University Equestrian Federation’s Student Riding Nations Cup held in Prod, Romania in May, Zappitelli beat out all but one of 45 international competitors on her way to a silver medal in show jumping. Her strong performance helped the three-member United States college team trot away with an overall fourth-place finish.

Zappitelli hails from northern Illinois, somewhat of a haven for horse lovers, so it’s no surprise her interest in riding began at an early age. “I always liked animals and begged my Mom to let me ride, but she always told me I was too little,” she says. “But one day she gave in, and that was it. What my parents once thought was a fleeting hobby has become my life.”

Since then, Zappitelli has built a solid resume of competitive riding experiences including many competitions as a teenager, a year on the varsity hunt seat and dressage riding teams as an undergraduate at the University of Findlay, and, after transferring to UW–Madison, three years on the UW Equestrian Team where she served as captain her senior year.

“At first I wanted to be a pro, but after my year at Findlay I decided I would rather keep horseback riding my hobby and pursue veterinary medicine,” says Zappitelli on why she transferred to UW–Madison. “I decided I wanted to compete as an amateur forever and just ride like a pro.”

The world of amateur riding has its fair share of tough competition. In December 2012, Zappitelli faced top-notch student riders from a host of other nations when she competed in the Collegiate World Finals in Norway. She’s quick to credit her exceptional coaches—Mark Aplin, Kyle Dewar, and Kathy Frame—for a great deal of the success she has had.

Zappitelli’s love of competitive riding is reflected in her clinical area of interest—equine sports medicine. As a rider and former horse owner—she had two that she sold before leaving home for college—she has learned first-hand what it takes to bring an animal back from injury.

Her extensive exposure to horses has made her more effective as an equine care provider, according to Dr. Howard Ketover, a veterinarian at Irongate Equine Clinic, an ambulatory practice in Madison, Wis., where Zappitelli has acquired some valuable hands-on experience. Her years in the industry have honed her ability to interact not only with horses but also with their owners, he says, which will prove invaluable as she pursues her career.

“Everyone can gain the kind of experience she has had, but she’s ahead of the curve,” says Ketover. “She knows what she’s doing. She’s a huge asset for us.”

After veterinary medical school, Zappitelli hopes to take on an equine internship. Her dream job, however, would be working as a veterinarian for the U.S. Olympic Team.

“It’s such a huge part of my life,” Zappitelli says. “I couldn’t imagine living without horses. I’m really looking forward to starting my career in equine veterinary medicine and having the opportunity to give back to an industry that has given me so much.”

Nik Hawkins

New Administration, Development Staff

The SVM is pleased to welcome two new senior administrators to the fold. Edward Rodriguez has joined the school as associate dean and chief financial officer. Ed comes to the SVM from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee where he has 22 years of experience in business, finance, and administration. His primary duties will involve developing budget and funding strategies for the school and teaching hospital.

Kristi Thorson has accepted the position of associate dean for advancement and administration. Although she leaves her former role as director of external relations, she will continue to work closely with alumni. Taking on some of her previous responsibilities will be Heidi Kramer, the SVM’s newly hired associate director for development. Heidi, who comes to the school from Agrace Hospice Care, will assist Thorson and Colin Nemeth, director of development, with fundraising strategy and initiatives.

“I know that Kristi, Ed, and Heidi will be outstanding additions to our efforts on behalf of the school and hospital and will help us lead veterinary medicine in its educational, research, service, and clinical goals,” says Dean Mark D. Markel.

PET TIPS

Spring means wet weather, prime time for your horse’s hooves to fall victim to thrush. The best defense is to keep your horse’s environment as dry as possible, cleaning his stall frequently so that he doesn’t need to stand in wet bedding. Also make sure to pick his hooves often. You’ll know thrush right away by the black, foul smelling substance you’ll find in the grooves of his hooves.
SVM Benefits from Influx of New Faculty

The University of Wisconsin–Madison has dealt with serious budget cuts in the past decade, and in the face of dwindling resources, much of the campus has been forced to make difficult decisions. The UW School of Veterinary Medicine (SVM) has relinquished 11 faculty positions in that time but is on its way to recovering some of what it has lost.

The SVM is in the process of filling six new faculty positions made possible by greater financial support from central campus and an enhanced funding model that will increase the school’s funding level going forward. The openings include:

- tenure-track positions in food animal medicine, ophthalmology, medical oncology, and neuro- and developmental toxicology;
- a tenure-track/clinical-track position in radiation oncology; and
- a clinical-track position in special species.

Four of the positions arose from recruitment negotiations when Mark D. Markel was offered the school’s deanship in August 2012. “My highest priority was that the school should be reinvigorated after the loss of so many faculty positions,” says Markel. One of these four positions is permanent and three will be funded by central campus for three years, after which the school will be responsible for funding them.

Two positions have been filled. Robert Lipinski will join the Department of Comparative Biosciences as an assistant professor. Dr. Lipinski comes to the SVM from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine where he holds a postdoctoral fellowship. He received his Ph.D. in environmental toxicology from UW–Madison. His teaching will focus on developmental anatomy and his research on developmental toxicology and cranio-facial abnormalities.

Angela McCleary-Wheeler has accepted a position in the Department of Medical Sciences as assistant professor of medical oncology. Dr. McCleary-Wheeler earned her DVM at Iowa State University and will earn her Ph.D. in biochemistry and molecular biology from the Mayo Clinic Graduate School in the fall. She previously worked as a medical oncology resident at the North Carolina State University Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital.

Ophthalmology Service Excels with Donor’s Help

Marinny Potter’s first dog, a rescued Bichon named Orville, had an unusual spell of bad luck with his eyes. From cataracts and a retinal detachment to glaucoma and a corneal ulcer, he ran the gamut of ocular diseases and disorders.

“We saw Marilyn a lot,” says Ellison Bentley, clinical professor of comparative ophthalmology who at the time was a resident caring for Orville. “Everything that could happen to Orville’s eyes happened.”

In 2001, Orville underwent two cataract surgeries that have a success rate of about 80 to 85 percent in dogs. However, Bichons are known to have complications during the procedure, and Orville’s case was exceptionally difficult. Still, Bentley and her team managed to save his vision in one eye.

As other eye conditions arose, Potter remained completely devoted to Orville’s health and continued to put her trust in the staff at the UW Veterinary Care Teaching Hospital. In all, she and Orville made 35 round trips between Oshkosh and Madison.

“They were very good with Orville,” says Potter. “There were problems, but they were right there to take care of him. Everyone was so considerate and helpful and concerned.”

Despite his trials, Orville lived a long, happy life. Bentley says she was pleased to see this, especially for such a memorable dog. “He was very, very special,” she says. “He was smart, sweet, and good, and a wonderful companion.”

Potter’s experience with the Ophthalmology Service left her with a positive impression of the teaching hospital and its people. “I think it’s a fantastic place,” says Potter. “The research that goes on and the direct clinical care are superb. You always get the feeling that the staff is sincerely interested in your pet and you, which makes for an excellent relationship.”

In fact, Potter’s affinity for the Ophthalmology Service has remained strong for years though she has not had a reason to return. She has rescued two other Bichons, but neither has had eye problems; still, she continues to support ophthalmology with generous donations.

“Having spent as much time as I did with Orville at the hospital, I saw how much benefit could come from donors and the good care that donations lead to,” says Potter. “It pleases me to help them with whatever they need.”

Her first contribution helped replace the eyepieces on a microscope, which were very rigid and could not be angled down to accommodate a resident who was shorter in stature. She also provided $25,000 to upgrade the service’s imaging capabilities. This included the purchase of a fundus camera, which can take photos of the retina and proves highly useful in identifying lesions, teaching residents, and educating clients about their pets’ conditions.

“She basically took us into a whole new world,” says Bentley.

In 2011, Potter provided funding for an electroretinogram machine, which has improved the service’s diagnostic capabilities and enables them to determine retinal causes of blindness. Most recently, in 2012, Potter provided $21,000 in matching funds for the purchase of a new surgery microscope with improved optics and a better lighting source.

“It’s used in 80 percent of our surgeries, and we would be lost without it,” says Bentley. “Marilyn really gets how complicated and life-changing these ophthalmology problems can be for dogs and owners.”

Marilyn Potter and Orville

Marilyn Potter discusses some of the equipment that was purchased thanks to Marilyn Potter’s donations. Left to right: Electroretinogram and slit lamp.
Curricular Advancements Coming to the SVM

In the near future, the UW School of Veterinary Medicine (SVM) will be augmenting its curriculum with new opportunities for veterinary medical students. Developed in response to an extensive review of the school’s core curriculum and clinical education practices, two new initiatives—a program of “selectives” and a series of clinical competency blended learning modules—will be launched to enhance the learning experience at the SVM.

Selectives Provide More Options for Students

Through the new selectives initiative, one week during each of semesters two through five of the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) program will be set aside to allow students to pursue a focused topic or experience of interest. This can include shadowing opportunities in a clinical context, exposure to research, and interaction with guest lecturers who are experts in areas not currently represented at the school.

“One of the most exciting components of the new selectives program is the introduction of hands-on experience in primary care clinical practice situations early in the curriculum,” says Nigel Cook, clinical associate professor of food animal production medicine and chair of the SVM’s Curriculum Committee. “This is something our students have been asking for and we finally have a place in the curriculum to provide this opportunity.”

The modular approach provides several other distinct advantages. It will

- allow the school to add course content without requiring additional semester-long faculty and staff commitments;
- encourage alternative teaching methods that cater to a wider variety of learning styles; and
- increase classroom interaction between first-, second-, and third-year students.

“These are excellent opportunities for students to explore areas where they have strength and interest, but little exposure,” says Lynn Maki, interim associate dean for academic affairs.

The selectives will be launched in the 2013–14 academic year with a modest number of course options that will grow over time. Some will address previously unavailable topics while others will adapt topics from current elective options.

Clinical Competency Modules Expose Students to Unusual Cases

While the selectives courses will concentrate on the end of the first year through the beginning of the third year, the blended learning clinical competency modules will focus on the fourth year when DVM students spend the majority of their time in clinical rotations at the UW Veterinary Care Teaching Hospital. The modules will give students experience in seldom-seen clinical areas in which the American Veterinary Medical Association Council of Education requires them to be competent.

“Certain cases—rabies for example—are difficult for students to get exposure to because they are rare, and so their performance in these areas is not consistently observed or assessed,” says Robert Hardie, clinical associate professor of small animal surgery and chair of the SVM’s Clinical Education Taskforce. “If students do not see a particular type of case through clinical rotations, then they will have the modules as an option for gaining that experience.”

The clinical competency modules are classified as “blended learning” because they will deliver content in a variety of ways, including online, small group, and self-directed learning exercises. The taskforce identified the topics for these modules based on feedback from graduating student exit interview surveys from 2009–11 and evaluation of the core competencies obtained by fourth-year students during clinical rotations in 2009–12.

To kickstart the process, the SVM has applied for funding through the UW–Madison Educational Innovation initiative to develop online modules that address three different topics: identification of animal abuse, management of rabies-infected patients, and identification of foreign-born animal diseases, such as Foot and Mouth Disease. Dean Mark D. Markel also has committed SVM funds to supporting faculty as they develop these modules, which should be available to students in spring 2014.

“At first the modules will be filling gaps,” says Hardie. “But in the future, they should be created to augment or enhance clinical training and help students acquire more advanced skills in a clinical rotation.”

Nik Hawkins

Likely Selectives Topics

- Primary care large/mixed animal practice and small animal practice
- Small animal nutrition
- Clinical behavior
- Dairy ration evaluation and planning
- Dairy cattle hoof-trimming and lameness prevention
- Shelter medicine
- Introduction to veterinary medical research
- Small animal internal medicine and primary care shadowing
- Equine dentistry
- Clinical therapeutics
- Clinical parasitology
- Clinical pathology
- The art of clinical communication
- Exotics/zoo animal restraint and anesthesia

New Faculty

Esther Chon, DVM, has joined the Department of Medical Sciences as a part-time clinical instructor where her duties include teaching courses in companion animal medicine. Dr. Chon earned her veterinary medical degree from the University of California, Davis. Then she completed a rotating internship at the Veterinary Medical and Surgical Group in Ventura, Cal., followed by an oncology internship at Angell Animal Medical Center in Boston, Mass. She worked as a clinical trials associate at Friendship Hospital for Animals in Washington, D.C., before completing her residency in medical oncology at the UW School of Veterinary Medicine and joining the faculty. Her clinical interests include the pathogenesis and treatment of canine oral melanoma.

Daryl Buss with Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation President Bill Bruins.

Buss Receives Farm Bureau Award

The Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation (WFBF) presented former Dean Daryl D. Buss with the “Distinguished Service to Agriculture” award in December. The award is given to an individual for outstanding contributions to the success of Wisconsin’s agricultural industry. Buss served as dean of the school from 1994 until he retired in June 2012.

“Wisconsin is fortunate to have experienced the leadership of Daryl Buss,” said WFBF Board Director Jim Holte, who nominated Buss for the award. “As dean of the School of Veterinary Medicine, he helped provide the livestock industry with talented and well-prepared professionals.”

Nik Hawkins

5
Study Advances Treatment of Respiratory Failure in ALS Patients

Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig’s disease, is a neurological disorder that affects 5 out of every 100,000 people worldwide and proves fatal in most patients within 3 to 5 years of diagnosis. The most frequent cause of death in ALS patients is breathing failure because, as the disease progresses, it kills the nerve cells that cause the respiratory muscle to contract.

Although scientists have studied this devastating disease for almost two centuries, they have developed few effective treatments and no cure. Still, advancements are being made. A new study conducted by researchers from the UW School of Veterinary Medicine (SVM) shows the potential for two complementary treatments—stem cell therapy and intermittent exposure to low oxygen—to preserve and even restore breathing capacity in rats with a condition similar to ALS in humans.

“This study represents a convergence of two different approaches that we think will be mutually reinforcing,” says Gordon Mitchell, professor of comparative biosciences at the SVM and co-principal investigator for the study.

ALS causes paralysis by killing motor neurons, the nerve cells that send electrical impulses from the spinal cord to the muscles to produce movement. When the disease attacks the cervical spinal cord, phrenic motor neurons begin to die and stop sending signals via the phrenic nerves to the diaphragm—the respiratory muscle essential to breathing. This degeneration leads to death from respiratory failure.

The researchers tested the potential of two treatments for addressing this problem in laboratory rats in the end-stage of ALS and found very promising results. One part of the study, led by Clive Svendsen, now director of the Regenerative Medicine Institute at the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, used human neural progenitor stem cell transplants to repair the environment around the phrenic motor neurons. Although the treatments did not replace dying neurons, they slowed the rate at which the cells died and helped preserve breathing function.

“They seem to act as support or nursing cells that prevent the neurons from dying,” says Svendsen, whose team performed the stem cell injections on the UW–Madison campus while he was co-director of the UW Stem Cell and Regenerative Medicine Center.

“We found that the stem cells didn’t need to be right next to the phrenic nerve cells to have an impact,” says Nicole Nichols, a Parker B. Francis post-doctoral fellow who conducted all of the neurophysiological analysis for the study at the SVM. “As long as they’re in relatively close proximity, they can still have a therapeutic effect.”

This is an important finding for potential clinical translation to humans, Nichols says, because it suggests that as long as the stem cells are injected close to the phrenic nerve cells, they will make their way to where they are needed and have a positive effect.

For the second part of the study, Nichols, Mitchell, and their team tested the effects of a novel low-oxygen treatment on the ability of surviving motor neurons to generate breathing. Acute intermittent hypoxia (AIH) delivers intervals of air containing non-damaging, low oxygen levels to trigger a response that strengthens the motor neuron signals. AIH can help stimulate function in muscles associated with breathing and limbs and has been applied successfully to spinal injury cases in humans. In this study, the method restored the function of phrenic nerves in the rats to normal levels, helping to restore the ability to breathe despite the loss of a significant amount of motor nerve cells.

“It’s fascinating that just one half hour of exposure to AIH can have such a robust effect,” says Nichols. “It actually enhances the output of the surviving neurons.”

“Together, the findings tell us that these two treatments have complementary translational potential to treat breathing deficits in ALS patients,” says Mitchell.

Mitchell says the study, which was funded by National Institutes of Health and the ALS Association, is unusual because most ALS research and experimental treatments target the loss of function in patients’ limbs, which does not address the most common cause of mortality in ALS patients. “There is no therapy that is going to prolong their lives unless it also improves breathing,” he says.

According to Svendsen, the findings have informed other work that has wider implications for humans. The California Institute of Regenerative Medicine has provided him with funding to design and carry out a trial in humans that uses similar stem cells in ALS patients, although this particular study will also focus on lower spinal cord and leg function. In addition, Mitchell and his team are undertaking studies using a similar AIH method to help improve leg strength and walking in patients with mild spinal cord injuries.

“Ultimately, we would like to use AIH in ALS patients,” says Nichols. “If we can improve their breathing even by a small amount, it would be a huge step in increasing their quality of life.”

The study is published in the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine.

Nik Hawkins
Alum’s Clinic on ‘Wright’ Track

Very few veterinarians can lay claim to their own practice within a few years of graduation. But Ramard Wright, DVM 2008, accomplished that very feat when he purchased Brown Deer Animal Hospital in November 2011, only two and a half years after leaving the UW School of Veterinary Medicine (SVM). Now redubbed Wright’s Brown Deer Animal Hospital, the clinic, located just outside of Milwaukee, is thriving under his direction.

Wright distinguished himself as an exceptional student while at the SVM. Those who know him are quick to mention his charisma, keen intelligence, and unwavering work ethic, qualities he has carried with him into his practice. But a great deal led up to his enrollment in secondary degree.

“I’m fortunate that he’s a patient, diligent, hard-working man who didn’t have a degree but pushed me to get one,” Wright says of his grandfather.

Before he even began college, Wright was already earning his clinical stripes. In high school he landed a job at St. Paul Veterinary Clinic where he started cleaning cages and eventually worked his way up to more interesting responsibilities.

“When I interacted with the animals, I found that I have a skill that a lot of other people don’t have,” Wright says. It wasn’t long before the clinicians at St. Paul noticed his easy rapport with animals and sometimes relied on him to calm the feisty cases. Wright’s current clients have also taken stock of his natural ability.

“He seems to have a real connection with animals,” says Peter Gensler. He and his wife, Jane, recall how their shepherd mix, Bear, could not be coaxed out of the parking lot into the clinic. For a few visits, Wright examined Bear in the Genslers’ van, but Bear soon allowed Wright to lead him inside.

Now he walks in on his own. “I watch Bear closely, and he never flinches for Dr. Wright,” says Jane Gensler.

Wright has not only instilled trust in Bear but also his owners. He helped see the Genslers through a trying time when they lost McKenzie, their lab-pit bull mix, and they have been impressed ever since. “If Dr. Wright left Brown Deer, we would take Bear wherever he is,” says Jane Gensler.

The dedication of Wright’s clients comes as no surprise to Jason Bleedorn, a clinical assistant professor of surgical sciences at the SVM who as a resident worked with Wright. “Within five minutes of being in the exam room, he would always have a relationship with the clients,” he says.

Honoring his skills with animals and clients, Wright racked up six years of experience in clinics before he even set foot in the SVM. The familiarity he gained with many aspects of veterinary medicine gave him a leg up in school, he says, and helped him focus on one of his true passions—surgery.

“I could do surgeries all day,” Wright says.

“The cottage sparked Wright’s curiosity, but his grandfather fanned the flames and encouraged him to carry that burn into higher education. After two years at Tuskegee University in Alabama, Wright transferred to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee where he earned a degree in biology, becoming the first in his family to earn a postsecondary degree.

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“He seems to have a real connection with animals,” says Peter Gensler. He and his wife, Jane, recall how their shepherd mix, Bear, could not be coaxed out of the parking lot into the clinic. For a few visits, Wright examined Bear in the Genslers’ van, but Bear soon allowed Wright to lead him inside.
Wright says, "I love that aspect of veterinary medicine. I do more surgeries than most vets who are five years out of school. I love that, unlike medical treatments sometimes, the outcome is literally in my hands."

Fortunately, surgery happens to be one of the more lucrative services a veterinary medical practice can offer, so Wright gives credit to the SVM for providing an experience that has helped his clinic succeed. He also continues to learn about surgery whenever he can by floating questions to SVM faculty and following up on cases he refers to the UW Veterinary Care Teaching Hospital. "He learns as much as he can from each case," says Bleedorn.

In addition to surgery, Wright devotes time to client education and the promotion of preventative medicine and vaccines, which he says requires a little extra effort and the right communication style. The added attention he gives to his clients seems to have paid off because his caseload has grown steadily in the last year. While mostly a good thing, even growth comes with problems.

"I only had one day off last year," says Wright with a haggard smile. Even with six people on staff, he still spends a great deal of time on paperwork, personnel management, and supply ordering. But in December he hired fellow alum and classmate, Rebecca Banks, DVM 2008, on a part-time basis to share some of the workload. "Both of us really love our jobs. We're here because we love animals and we want to help and be advocates for them."

"I always tell people to do what you're good at and do what you love," says Wright. For him, it is practicing veterinary medicine and helping the wonderful animals and people it brings through his doors.

Nik Hawkins

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“He works so hard and so often, and I wanted to help out so the practice can flourish and he doesn’t burn out,” says Banks who feels they will work well together. “Both of us really love our jobs. We’re here because we love animals and we want to help and be advocates for them.”

“I always tell people to do what you’re good at and do what you love,” says Wright. For him, it is practicing veterinary medicine and helping the wonderful animals and people it brings through his doors.

Nik Hawkins

Dynamic Endoscope Improves Equine Diagnoses

With help from the Morrie Waud Equine Fund, the UW Veterinary Care Teaching Hospital recently acquired a relatively new type of technology called a dynamic endoscope—a tiny camera that is inserted into a horse’s throat through its nose to evaluate how well the airways are functioning.

This tool, which fits inside the horse’s bridle and saddle pad and transmits readings to a remote tablet, can be used while a horse is moving or being ridden without interference. This is important because the majority of functional problems in equine upper airways only occur during exercise.

“These conditions cause exercise intolerance or abnormal airway noises that can be limiting to an athletic horse’s career,” says Samantha Morello, clinical assistant professor of large animal surgery. “But the dynamic endoscope gives us a much more accurate diagnosis with which we can better plan treatment.” Learn more at www.vetmed.wisc.edu/dynamic-endoscope.