



Equine TLC

Dr. Meagan McBurney is the first recipient of the Dino and Dr. Ashburner Award in Equine Care, a special award that recognizes veterinary students who show exceptional compassion for their equine patients.

Working with horses has been part of Dr. Meagan McBurney's life since she was a young 4-H member growing up on her family's cattle farm at Deleau, Man. Those years of hands-on experience — combined with her four years of veterinary training at WCVM — have turned McBurney into a veterinarian who's very much in tune with the needs of her equine patients.

"One horse might be willing to accept something you do, but there is no telling how the next horse will react to the same approach," explains McBurney, who graduated from WCVM in June 2007. "You need to be able to read their actions and adapt your approach to best suit the individual horse."

McBurney's perceptive way with horses hasn't gone unnoticed. In June, the new veterinarian became the first to receive a new award called the "Dino and Dr. Ashburner Award in Equine Care" at the 2007 WCVM Graduation Banquet.

Created by the L. David Dubé and Heather Ryan Foundation, the \$7,000 scholarship recognizes a fourth-year student who has provided compassionate care for equine patients during the fourth-year clinical rotations. The award was named in honour of the special relationship between WCVM field veterinarian Dr. Sue Ashburner and Dino, one of her long-time equine patients. The Quarter horse gelding, who was owned by Ryan and Dubé, passed away in 2006.

McBurney had the chance to watch and learn from Ashburner as well as many other veterinarians during her clinical rotations and summer jobs in veterinary clinics. Those experiences have demonstrated the benefits of handling horses with care.

"A big part of caring for horses is just handling them appropriately. Providing them comfort while they're in the hospital and giving them some extra TLC so they feel more at home and not quite as stressed out — all of those efforts really do make a difference in how the animal responds to you," says McBurney, who also has experience in training young horses under saddle.

As for talking with the owners of her patients, McBurney finds that her past experiences in equine competitions and organizations help her to quickly relate to her clients. Plus, her farming background gives her an appreciation for the variety of reasons why people raise and own horses.

"A client with two horses in his back yard sees things much differently than an equine rancher who has 150 mares on his farm. As a practitioner, my goal is to be able to change my perspective to match their needs and wants rather than seeing things only one way."

Becoming a mixed animal practitioner was McBurney's initial focus when she first came to WCVM. But during her second summer as a veterinary student, McBurney worked at Elders Equine Clinic in Winnipeg, Man., where the patients range from Thoroughbred racehorses to champion show competitors. After that, she was hooked and spent her next summer visiting four equine clinics in California, Utah, Colorado and Nevada through unofficial externships.

COMPASSIONATE CARE GIVER (from left to right): L. David Dubé and his wife, Heather Ryan, present the "Dino and Dr. Ashburner Award in Equine Care" to Dr. Meagan McBurney. The Saskatoon couple presented the \$7,000 award to the newly-graduated McBurney during WCVM's 2007 Graduation Banquet in June. The annual scholarship, which was created by the Heather Ryan and L. David Dubé Foundation, recognizes a fourth-year student who has provided compassionate care for their equine patients and has acted as their advocate.

"It was a great experience for me — it really gave me the chance to see how a variety of practitioners approach cases and situations in different ways," says McBurney, who accompanied veterinarians during their regular farm visits and clinic appointments.

Now, McBurney is in the midst of a one-year clinical internship at Edmonton Equine Veterinary Services where she has daily contact with equine patients and Alberta horse owners who are involved in everything from show jumping and dressage to rodeo competitions and ranching.

It's an interesting mix of people, horses and cases that's definitely enriching McBurney's experience in the world of horse health care. But no matter where her career eventually takes her, the young veterinarian is very clear about her objectives in patient care.

"My goals are to provide the best service and quality medicine to my patients and clients — I want to be the kind of practitioner who will go that extra mile for them. I want to help clients seek out different treatment options and give them as much opportunity as I can to make the decisions that work for their animals and for themselves," explains McBurney.

Spoken like a true advocate of patient care.

The Heather Ryan and L. David Dubé Foundation also presented the "Buddy and Dr. Snead Award in Small Animal Care" during the 2007 WCVM Graduation Banquet. For more details, check out the Fall 2007 issue of Vet Topics, publication for the Companion Animal Health Fund, at www.cahf.usask.ca.

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