

2001

A Day at the Racetrack

Brett Kirch
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/iowastate_veterinarian



Part of the [Small or Companion Animal Medicine Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kirch, Brett (2001) "A Day at the Racetrack," *Iowa State University Veterinarian*: Vol. 63 : Iss. 1 , Article 12.
Available at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/iowastate_veterinarian/vol63/iss1/12

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Iowa State University Veterinarian by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.

A Day at the Racetrack

BRETT KIRCH[†]

Veterinary medicine students are always looking for ways to offset the rising price of tuition. This effort often manifests itself in the form of a part-time job. One of the more interesting opportunities for Iowa State University students is serving as a state veterinary technician for the State of Iowa's Gaming and Racing Commission.

State vet techs work in the test barn at Prairie Meadows Racetrack and Casino in Altoona, Iowa. Technicians assist the state veterinarians in the testing of racehorses. The duties involve the collection of urine and blood used to screen for regulated substances. The State of Iowa annually employs approximately twenty students to serve part-time as technicians. Two full-time summer positions are also available to students who are interested in additional administrative duties. Students are employed for the complete racing season, which in Iowa runs from April to November and includes thoroughbred, quarter horse, and standard-bred racing meets.

Technician duties involve directing an individual horse and handler through the testing process. In Iowa, the first and second place horses are tested and occasionally a random horse is selected for testing. A technician is assigned to a horse and is responsible for following it from the track through the final paperwork. The technician picks up the animal at the test barn gate and witnesses the washing and cool-down period. Then the individual collects a urine sample. Following the urine collection, a blood sample is drawn by the supervising state veterinarian. The technician is then responsible for transporting the urine sample, blood samples, and the handler to the in-house laboratory for sample preparation and completion of the paperwork. The full-time student technician staffs the in-house laboratory and prepares the blood and urine samples for storage and transportation to the Racing Chemistry Laborato-

ries in Ames, Iowa. Once the collector has certified the samples and the paperwork is completed, the horse is released from the test barn. The complete process can take only minutes or up to a maximum time limit of one and a half hours, controlled exclusively by the horse's willingness to provide urine. If the animal is not cooperative and has nothing better to do for 90 minutes, the urine sample is bypassed and extra blood is drawn for testing.

The full-time technicians, in addition to managing the in-house laboratory, are also responsible for scheduling the student employees of the test barn and the daunting task of keeping the paper flow moving. These technicians are also responsible for managing the Lasix program administered to horses afflicted with exercise induced pulmonary hemorrhage.

The state veterinary technician job offers a grand educational opportunity to view an aspect of the horse industry that most people do not know exists. Barb Hippiie, a third year vet student who has been a technician for the past two seasons, said this job has opened her eyes to a career possibility that she had not considered before her racetrack employment. She will be pursuing a racetrack internship position this coming year.

Technicians are allowed to join the state veterinarians on morning soundness examinations performed prior to the animal's race. Todd Tedrow and Mike Van De Griend, both third year students, cited the knowledge concerning lameness evaluation as being a most valuable experience gained from their employment at the racetrack. For many, just the opportunity to work around the horses is extremely beneficial. Rob Dyke, a second year student, especially appreciated learning to work around the wide variety of temperaments exhibited by racehorses. These skills are learned only by doing and can be very crucial to a future veterinarian.

On the other hand, this job is not without its risks. The majority of the animals are well-behaved, but there is an occasional

[†]Brett Kirch is a second-year veterinary student at Iowa State University.

horse that shows a less than hospitable attitude towards its technician. This situation can translate into bumps, bruises, and nips for the vet tech. Safety is paramount at Prairie Meadows, and it is a tribute to the individuals involved that the safety record at the test barn is extremely good.

One of the greatest benefits to the students who take on the challenge of the test barn is the diversity of exposure the racing industry provides. Emily Galloway, a second-year student, stated that meeting new people and getting to know her classmates better was especially valuable to her. This sentiment is echoed by almost all of the students who participate.

This job also comes with extremely challenging hours. Many evenings are spent at

the track when friends are out enjoying themselves. Travel from Ames to Altoona is frustrating to students who are often pressed for time. Summer holidays are spent at the track and not on the lake. To ease the burden, the holiday barbecues and potluck dinners held at the track are a great diversion. Pizza or other foods graciously provided by supervisors, students, grooms, handlers, or the lucky winning trainer or owner help to ease the burden on the starving veterinary medicine student. While there are drawbacks to sacrificing your personal time, the rewards that being a state veterinary technician provide are numerous and invaluable to the aspiring veterinary student. ♦

Continued from page 21

Directors for Bethesda Lutheran Homes for mentally retarded citizens, and he has just joined the Story County Health Empowerment Board, which sees to the needs of Story County children under the age of five. With

his retirement, Dr. Kluge will be able to devote more time to these other activities and to his three daughters, one son, and nine grandchildren, all of whom keep him on his toes. ♦

Spotlight on the IVMA

JENNIFER SHACKETT*

Dr. Les Hemmingson (ISU '65) is keeping busy in the middle of his term as president of the Iowa Veterinary Medical Association. He and the other officers recently held Legislative Day and were able to meet with governor Tom Vilsack as well as the State of Iowa Senate and House. Meetings were also held with several of the legislators on an individual basis.

The professional growth committee headed by Dr. Duke Wilgenbusch is in the process of developing a mentor program that would link IVMA veterinarians with ISU College of Veterinary Medicine students. Students in their first, second, or third year will be paired with veterinarians in order to gain additional networking op-

portunities and professional guidance. The program should start next fall and will be coordinated with the dean's office at the College of Veterinary Medicine. Student interest in the program is very strong, and although twenty-five to thirty IVMA members have signed up to be mentors, many more are still needed.

Dr. Dave Wilgenbusch, president-elect of the IVMA, recently met with Patty Judge, Secretary of Agriculture, in order to develop a contingency plan in the event that foot and mouth disease would become an issue in the area. More meetings are scheduled in order to keep abreast of the potential situation. ♦

For more information, be sure to check out the new IVMA website: www.iowavma.org

*Jennifer Shackett is a first-year veterinary student at Iowa State University.