October 2009

Dirty Jobs

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Recommended Citation
Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos/vol2010/iss1/8

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DIRTY JOBS

And no, we don’t mean strippers! *ETHOS* investigates some of Iowa State’s messiest professions.

story Kyle Peterson
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Univ e rsity Veter inarian
Bruce Leuschen, clinician

The Job
As University Veterinarian, Bruce Leuschen is responsible for the health of the animals owned by the University—about 3,000 cattle, hogs and sheep. With that many animals, it’s a good thing he’s got help. “We teach the farms how to take care of stuff, so I don’t treat each one individually,” Leuschen says. “If it’s a routine case of something, they will follow a protocol, and if something gets more complicated then I’ll see the animal and take care of it.”

Just like humans, animals get sick. Leuschen said that when he teaches students about calves, he uses the example of kids going to kindergarten. “Everybody rides the bus and they get grouped together, and what happens is everybody ends up with snotty noses and colds,” Leuschen explains. “The same thing happens with calves.”

The Dirt
Leuschen has his hands in a lot of animals—figuratively, but literally too. Sometimes that includes surgery.

For example, one common ailment in dairy cattle is the displaced abomasum, or displaced stomach. The cow’s fourth stomach, or abomasum, shifts from its original position. Surgery is required to put it back in place. Often, the procedure is done in the field and takes about an hour from incision to suture—that is, if he’s not teaching.

“It takes twice as long with students, just because they’re learning, and they’re not as efficient with their suturing abilities yet,” he explains.

Another part of normal veterinary work with cattle is called rectal palpation. Wearing a shoulder-length plastic sleeve, the vet inserts his or her hand into the cow’s rectum. From there, many of the animal’s vital organs are within reach.

“Palpation is used to check cows for pregnancy, and is a part of every full examination. Although the animal may be a bit uncomfortable during the procedure, it doesn’t harm the cow at all, despite the depth of the insertion.

“I can go to my armpit,” Leuschen says. “If I go to the kidney, I’m going up to my shoulder, sometimes as far as I can reach.” Leuschen said he probably palpates about 3,000 cows a year. With practice comes perfection. “Yes, it can be messy if you make it messy, but it’s not messy for a seasoned guy who knows how to get this done,” he says.

He also runs labs where he teaches students how to do it. “The animal science students, they love their chance to go out and stick their arm in a cow the first time. The girls love it!” he laughed.

The Bottom Line
After working as a practicing vet, Leuschen came to Iowa State to pursue new challenges.

“You know, 23 years in practice, you see maybe everything you’re going to see, then,” Leuschen says. He sees himself as fulfilling man’s duty towards animals. “It’s kind of a covenant – a covenant between man and the animal,” Leuschen explains. “We take care of them, they take care of us.”

But what he enjoys about his job the most is the student interaction that his position allows. “Anytime I go out to the farm to do vet work, I take students with me,” Leuschen says. “So I’m always in a teaching mode.”

Did You Know?
Between the College of Agriculture and the College of Veterinary Medicine, ISU has a lot of cows, hogs and sheep to its name. Here’s where they’re at:

- Animal Science Farm – 800 cows
- Beef Teaching Farm – 320 cows
- Swine Nutrition Farm – 700 hogs
- Swine Teaching Farm – 500 hogs
- Swine Breeding Farm – 600 hogs
- Sheep Teaching Farm – 300 sheep
CUSTODIAL SERVICES
Jon Haggard, manager
Richard Reckseen, facilitator

THE JOB
Keeping the hallowed halls of Iowa State University clean and tidy is a monumental task. Between classrooms, corridors, stairways and restrooms, Facilities Planning and Management Custodial Services is responsible for about 6.5 million square feet of space. Divide that by 118—the number of custodians on staff—to find the size of each staff member’s daily workload.

“Each custodian is responsible for somewhere around 50,000 to 60,000 square feet,” Richard Reckseen, custodial services facilitator, says.

THE DIRT
Reckseen started as a custodian for Iowa State in 1982, and in 27 years, he’s pretty much seen it all.

In polite company, there are a lot of stories that the custodians will decline to tell. But sometimes they just can’t help themselves. For example: Reckseen once cleaned a common room with some pretty cheesy student-designed décor. “It had been neatly decorated with pizza slices,” he says. “I think they spelled out words.” Placed face-down and left to sit, they’d practically melded to the carpet.

On another occasion, students had drawn a target on a chalkboard and thrown overripe oranges at it. Custodians once found that a newly painted stairway had been speckled where students had spit chewing tobacco on the floor. “I’ve never quite comprehended why it’s so difficult to carry a cup,” Jon Haggard, custodial services manager, says.

...before the gymnastics equipment was locked up on a daily basis, Haggard said students periodically used it for “extracurricular activities.”

“The gymnastics mats are very bouncy.”

Reckseen stated matter-of-factly. With a job like theirs, maintaining a sense of humor helps. “You just kind of shake your head and say, ‘I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything like that,’” Haggard says.
THE BOTTOM LINE
It does have its perks, though, including autonomy and independence. “We’re organized into, currently, 15 self-directed work teams,” Reckseen says. “The teams don’t have a leader—it’s done by consensus.” That includes schedules.
Teams are largely responsible for deciding when they get work done. And there’s a lot of pride associated with having ownership in keeping a building in pristine shape. “In our business you have the self-satisfaction that you clean something and you see what you’ve done,” Haggard says.
Custodians know how important their work is—especially when potential students (and their parents) are in town. “We understand the value, from the cleanliness of our buildings to maintaining enrollment,” Reckseen says.
But budget cuts and staff cuts have custodians spread thinner than usual. “That’s been very difficult because they take pride in their work,” Reckseen added. Even custodians need a helping hand once in awhile.

“We are asking for partnership with the students,” Haggard explains. That means being smart and giving facilities the respect they deserve. Pizza belongs in your mouth, after all—not on the walls.

Even seemingly little things, like taking your newspaper with you when you leave a classroom, can go a long way. “Our staff notices and appreciates it,” Haggard says.