Horse Jobs

Ways to Work with Horses and Grow Your Equine Career
A Note From The Editor

Here at MyHorse Daily we are committed to bringing you the latest information designed to keep you and your horse healthy, happy and productive.

Enjoy the read!

Amy Herdy, Managing Editor
MyHorse Daily
If your love for horses transcends the recreational, you might consider a career in the equine industry. However, you needn’t be a star in the saddle to make horses your livelihood. Here’s a look at three vital jobs that are perennial favorites among the equine-minded.

Professional Trainer

“I don’t do lunch; I do lessons,” and “It’s not a job, it’s a life,” are a few of the phrases top trainer Karen Healey uses to describe the profession she chose for herself when she left college to work for legendary hunter/jumper trainer George Morris 40 years ago.

Little has changed about the path to becoming a professional hunter/jumper trainer today. Indeed, the same could be said of training professionally in any discipline. “Step number one is you’ve got to find somebody to apprentice with,” advises the California-based veteran, who has mentored many former students into professional careers. “Identify somebody who you have tremendous respect for, and throw yourself at their feet,” she urges.

Realistic expectations of what the job entails are important. “You need to know that riding will likely be a very small part of it,” she stresses. “Be willing to do anything and everything. And don’t sit there waiting to be told what to do: Look for things to do. “If you really, truly do that, you will find that most professionals really appreciate it and you will get opportunities to ride,” Healey continues.

You have to be willing to start from the bottom and work your way up. That’s just what her protégé Jennifer Alfano did, working first as a groom (for 1988 Olympic silver medalist Gem Twist), then honing her horsemanship in the hard work of a sales barn. When Alfano arrived at SBS Farms, she was well versed in many aspects of horsemanship and, equally important, she was anxious to learn more. It is worth noting, too, that the ability to take criticism constructively is key in a young equestrian looking to make a training career of her passion for horses.

Paths to Professionalism

Knowing you want to go pro early on is a big advantage. Courtney Calcagnini started as a working student for Mike McCormick and Tracey Fenney at Four M Farm when she was 13, then took on...
the same post for Colleen McQuay’s huge sales barn in Texas three years later. When Calcagnini aged out of the Junior ranks, the position with McQuay became paid. She spent six years gaining experience and knowledge with McQuay’s supervision and encouragement, then formed her own barn, CSC Farm in Pilot Point, Texas, in 2007.

Thanks to McQuay’s blessing and her own reputation as a determined hard worker, it didn’t take Calcagnini long to launch her business. Within about a month, she had 12 horses. “I never solicited one client,” Calcagnini says. “I got a few phone calls, and it grew from there.”

Today, she maintains 15–18 horses, owned by seven or eight clients, which the 28-year-old trainer describes as “perfect for me.” The clients include the Reid family, for whom she found the Adult Hunter Curtain Call. In 2009, Calcagnini rode the horse to USEF Grand Champion Horse of the Year as a Regular Working Hunter, which “really put me on the map nationally,” she notes.

Brian Walker took a different path after deciding on a training vocation. Under the tutelage of top equitation trainer Missy Clark, he concluded an elite Junior career by winning the ASPCA Maclay National Championship in 2001. Until then, Walker catch rode for several trainers, including show-jumper Todd Minikus, and that opened the door to working for him. “You go from being a top Junior rider where everybody is helping you to mucking stalls,” Walker recalls.

After roughly a year riding mostly young horses for Minikus, Walker accepted Olympic show jumper Peter Leone’s offer to work at his Lion Share Farms in Connecticut, where he taught lessons and schooled Juniors and Amateurs at home and at shows. Adding another dimension to his knowledge base and experience, Walker went to work for European show jumper Jan Tops in Holland. Walker’s ongoing friendship with Missy Clark, who had purchased horses through Tops, opened this door that Walker says taught him how to identify excellent prospects.

He returned to the States to work for Eddie Horowitz, whose subsequent retirement led to Walker running his own business, Woodside Farm, for the next three years. Walker then spent time as Old Salem Farm’s head trainer before relocating to Wellington, Florida, to jump start his business again.

**Money and Communication**

“Teaching and riding are the easy part,” says Walker. “The most difficult part is juggling all the finances, keeping the staff organized and dealing with a million things that you don’t think about as a Junior or Amateur.

“It’s such an expensive sport, and if you don’t have huge backing, things can be very hard. My advice is to figure out what everything costs and plan your finances very carefully before you go out on your own. Otherwise, you can run up a lot of debt.”

Courtney Calcagnini concurs. Her budget-conscious upbringing, a “love of numbers” and McQuay’s tutoring are assets in running her own business. While working for McQuay, Calcagnini eschewed new clothes and other niceties to stash away start-up funds. She began with a “very basic” business plan and profit-and-loss statement.

Over time, it has evolved to where she usually breaks even, or even loses a little money, on board and training but makes it up on show fees and profits from selling horses. Selling horses, she says, “is probably the best way to get ahead financially.” For now, those proceeds go straight into paying off her truck and trailer.

With help from an assistant, Calcagnini keeps meticulous track of services and supplies that need to be billed to clients. “The profit margin is not huge to begin with,” she notes. “A couple of grams of bute here and a new set of wraps there add up so quickly. You can never let it go. I have it set up so I pay and send bills at a certain time. You have to stay very organized.”

Experience gained under a professional trainer’s supervision can translate to a paying job further down the line.
Some young professionals establish themselves by building their business around a dominant client. “Putting all your eggs in one basket can be rewarding in the short term,” notes Walker. “Eventually, everything comes to an end, even when you end on a good note. When it does end, you are basically starting over, and you need to be prepared for that.”

Both Calcagnini and Walker say that keeping clients has a lot to do with being candid about expectations from the start. Clarifying costs for prospective clients is essential, adds Walker, as are frequent progress updates and goal reviews. Otherwise, both say, small problems can easily escalate into big problems.

The nature of client-trainer relationships can be challenging, Karen Healey acknowledges. Young professionals struggling to make ends meet may have mixed emotions toward clients with lots of disposable income, and the line between the trainer/student relationship and friendship can get blurry. “It’s important to keep a bit of distance to maintain a professional relationship,” Healey notes.

**Industry Resources**

Today’s hunter/jumper industry has a growing number of resources for those aspiring to successful training careers. The Certified Horsemanship Association, for example, promotes excellence in safety and education for the benefit of the horse industry through instructor certification, accreditation of facilities, the production of educational materials and the hosting of conferences. For information, visit www.CHA-hse.org or call (800) 399-0138.

Among the other programs designed

**Horse Profiling**

**The Secret to Motivating Equine Athlete**

While following wild horse herds in Wyoming and Montana, independent researcher Kerry Thomas realized that it is inside the horse and not what is outside that governs herd dynamics. He determined that this was the basis for everything horse—whatever role a horse plays in a human environment, whatever his breed, sport, or “job,” his emotional constitution dictates in large part his success or failure.

Thomas identified a system of emotional profiling that enables him to determine a horse’s performance tendencies, and then began to develop ways in which horses can be mentally conditioned toward a given goal.

Hardcover, 184 pages, $29.95, ZF735

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**The Eighty Dollar Champion**

November 1958: the National Horse Show at Madison Square Garden in New York City. Into the rarefied atmosphere of wealth and tradition comes the most unlikely of horses—a drab white former plow horse named Snowman—and his rider, Harry de Leyer. They were the longest of all longshots—and their win was the stuff of legend.

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**How Good Riders Get Good**

**Denny Emerson**

What do excellent riders possess that most do not? This is a question that many ask, but few have explored the sport of riding horses for an answer. Denny Emerson, an internationally known rider and one of the **Chronicle of the Horse**’s “50 most influential horsemen of the Twentieth Century,” has devoted years to thinking about this. He has drawn the conclusion that there are seven factors that relate to becoming a world-class rider: personal drive, life circumstances, support network, knowledge, physical skill, character traits, and the horse.

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**1-800-952-5813 (shipping + tax add’l)**
Other Equine Careers: Useful Links

Looking for still more ways to make a living with horses? There are many possibilities, some of which require specialized training or education. Check out these related links:

- A number of colleges offer majors in stable management, equestrian studies, equine science, equine journalism and the like. For a glimpse of which schools offer what, take a peek at the Equine Network’s EquineEdu 2012 digital directory: www.equisearch.com/cell-directory.

- Even if you don’t train horses professionally, you might consider starting your own boarding stable. Setting up your own equine business is the subject of this Perfect Horse article, available on EquiSearch.com: www.equisearch.com/farm_ranch/barns/open-business. Then get tips on how to run things right in this Practical Horseman article, also on EquiSearch.com: www.equisearch.com/farm_ranch/management/eqboard493.

- Love to travel? A career in equine tourism might be just the ticket. For a look at one successful professional’s take on this fascinating career option, see this article from Trail Rider magazine on EquiSearch.com: www.equisearch.com/uncategorized/karen-lancaster-equine-tourism.

- Equine-assisted therapy—including everything from “hippotherapy” to riding, driving and vaulting—can benefit the disabled or at-risk child or the physically or psychologically challenged adult, making the need for instructors trained and certified in this specialty greater than ever. Some therapy classes (even degrees in the field) are offered at colleges, while others are offered in stand-alone community programs. For more information, contact the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH) International at www.pathintl.org.

- There’s nothing quite like working at a racetrack, and if you aspire to become an exercise rider, jockey or stable manager, the North American Racing Academy has courses for you in conjunction with Kentucky’s Bluegrass Community & Technical College: http://bluegrass.kctcs.edu/Academics/Programs_of_Study/Equine_Studies.aspx. If being a racetrack official or even managing a track appeals, the University of Arizona’s special Racetrack Industry Program is designed to teach you the ropes (http://ua-rtip.org/).

- If you prefer hands-on work, many trainers of racehorses and sporthorses swear by equine massage therapy. Here is an EquiSearch.com link to a list of related organizations, some of which offer classes: www.equisearch.com/horses_care/health/alternative_therapies/hrmassage021103.

Equine-assisted therapy students at Lake Erie College are blindfolded to learn what a visually impaired rider experiences.

for up-and-coming professionals are the United States Hunter Jumper Association’s Trainer Certification and Provisional Trainers Programs. To learn more about these programs and related clinics and symposiums, visit www.ushja.org.

Healey and others also encourage mentoring relationships, particularly when purchasing show horses. “Buying horses for clients is a huge responsibility,” she says. “Ask someone you respect and trust for help and guidance. Even if you give them some of your commission in return, it is well worth the money spent.”

Above all, Calcagnini advises, “Try to do the right thing because you never know how what you do today will pay off tomorrow. Have integrity, be surrounded by the right people and save your dollars!”

Professional Groom/ Stable Manager

When you watch an international-level horse competing, you may only see the horse and rider working together as they strive for the blue ribbon. You also see the immaculate turnout of the horse, from his glossy coat to his perfect braids. While you can appreciate the handiwork of the horse groom, chances are you might not think about them as a part of the horses’ performances or even the management of an entire stable.

While there are a few courses for grooms in this country, most people learn from years on the job. Liv Gude began grooming professionally in 2006 and has groomed for Olympic riders Guenter Seidel and Sue Blinks. She has ridden in a variety of disciplines, including hunters, jumpers, cutting, reining and dressage. She is also the creator of Professional Equine Grooms (www.proequinegrooms.com), which informs and educates the horse world.
about professional grooms while providing resources for the grooms themselves. Here’s a look, from her perspective, at what this job entails.

**The Basics**
A typical day as a professional groom starts before most folks are out of bed. “We’re feeding, giving grain, changing water buckets, mucking stalls, sweeping and other typical barn-chore types of things. Then, the horses are ready to go, either for a ride, a handwalk/treadmill/exerciser or turnout,” Gude says. A professional groom will make sure of the following things: that the horse drank appropriately, ate well and that his manure and urine is normal in volume and consistency. It is also a groom’s duty, she adds, to ensure that all hooves are cleaned, all shoes are secure, the legs are normal and without heat, swelling or anything abnormal, and the horse’s temperature is normal—all before you even pick up a brush.

Then comes the actual grooming. “Each horse is groomed as if it’s going to the Olympics, except for maybe braids. There are no shortcuts. Horses are tacked up or booted for their activity in the morning. Care is taken during the grooming process to notice how they are feeling and acting. Is anything weird?”

“By now you should realize that a groom spends about 1% of the day actually grooming!” she says.

“After the first round of getting all of the horses out, it’s usually time for lunch, which of course involves all of the same attention to detail as the morning,” she continues. “Chores are repeated (think shampoo-bottle directions: lather, rinse, repeat; only muck, feed, repeat!)

Then it’s time for all of the horses to get out again, either for riding or turnout/walking. “And don’t forget the evening chores and feedings!” Gude says.

In between all of these tasks, there are always “extra” things to do on the farm such as fixing fence, clipping ears and legs, laundry, making grain, arena dragging, raking leaves, scooping manure from paddocks, pathways and arena, tractor repair, loading/unloading hay, helping with the vet or farrier…the list is quite extensive. Some barns also have a “night check” that is done later in the evening to check on everyone and maybe even to do one more feeding of hay.

“The bottom line is that a professional groom spends the vast majority of the day making sure the barn runs well and on time, and of course the horses are taken care of,” Gude says. “The top priority of a professional groom is the health and welfare of the horses and knowing each and every one of them like the back of your hand. This includes their personalities and every inch of their bodies. Any change in behavior, eating, digestion, or how their bodies feel is noted and reported. You may even catch yourself saying, ‘Oh my goodness! This tiny, tiny little bump was not there yesterday!’”
Challenges and Benefits

The most challenging parts of the job are usually the physical aspects, Gude attests. “You will spend many, many hours on your feet. You will unload hay. (If you are so unlucky as to unload three-string bales, it’s really heavy.) You will walk until you feel like you can’t walk anymore. You will sweep and muck and lift and bend over repeatedly. Eventually, you will not care who you bend over in front of. You will also get really fit—really strong—and you will find yourself flexing your arms in the mirror, because they will be spectacular. All of your friends will envy your bikini body at the same time they are making fun of your farmer tan (oh well!)”

For Gude, performing as a professional groom means “… being OK with being behind the scenes. It also means the unbelievable opportunity to work around folks that can give you amazing knowledge. I have learned more from vets, farriers, saddle fitters, massage therapists and trainers than you could possibly imagine.

Though it’s difficult to ascertain the average salary for a groom, it’s probably safe to say that “… it’s not a lot,” Gude admits. What you do get, she says, are perks like lessons or an apartment or bills paid. “You get an equine education like none other, travel (sometimes international travel) and great parties at horse shows … you can’t put a price on that.”

Equine Veterinarian

If you love caring for horses, chances are you’ve thought about a career in equine veterinary medicine. Here’s a look at what is involved, including a peek at four types of equine practices.

The Upside

High demand. There has never been a better time to choose a career as an equine veterinarian, according to the American Association of Equine Practitioners. A recent AAEP press release points out that the horse population of the United States now exceeds nine million and estimates that “more equine vets than ever before will be needed in the coming years.” Although veterinary schools here will graduate about 21,600 new veterinarians, according to a study conducted at Tufts University, the projected need nationwide is for 24,000 new veterinarians by then—and more than 70 percent of graduating vets opt for exclusively or predominantly small-animal practice.

The numbers have fueled predictions of a looming shortage of equine vets; meanwhile, it all adds up to high demand and excellent job opportunities for newly graduated veterinarians who choose the equine field.

Varied career options. Equine veterinarians work in environments ranging from small local private practices to university teaching hospitals. Other options include larger group practices or big referral practices, as well as work in the racing industry, at large breeding farms and for government agencies. There are opportunities during and after vet school to specialize in fields including surgery, reproduction and internal medicine. Many equine veterinarians also include some small animals in their practices; AAEP reported in March 2008 that less than 40 percent of its members’ practices were exclusively equine.

Opportunities for fulfillment. Most equine veterinarians come to the profession from a lifelong interest in horses;
becoming a vet has often been a goal for them since childhood. Recent technological advances in diagnostics make it possible to take tools such as ultrasound and digital X-rays directly to the farm, and electronic data transmission enables rural practitioners to confer about cases with colleagues worldwide. Equine practice can also provide the hard-to-quantify satisfaction of improving the lives and health of all kinds of horses.

Hurdles
Vet school. The bar is high. “There is keen competition for admission to veterinary schools,” according to information compiled by the US Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics.

How keen? About one in three applicants is accepted in a given year, according to AAEP, and that pool of applicants includes many who had applied earlier and had not been accepted. The reason for the crunch: While the number of accredited vet schools has remained largely the same since 1983, the number of applicants has risen significantly.

Lengthy preparation. The AAEP recommends that aspiring vets do as well as possible in junior high school science and biology, then pursue a strong science and math program in high school. Choose a college with a strong pre-veterinary program. According to the website www.veterinaryschooladmissions.com, your chances of admission to vet school are best at a school located in your state of residence, or a school with which your state has a formal agreement to subsidize tuition for a certain number of students. (For a complete listing of accredited veterinary schools in the US, Canada and overseas, go to www.aavmc.org.) Students usually earn a DVM or VMD degree in four years. This, and passage of state licensing requirements, qualifies a new vet to begin practice. To get more hands-on experience with the supervision of a seasoned veterinarian, however, many will seek an internship at medium-sized or large group practices. If a new vet’s goal is specialty practice such as surgery or reproduction, formal education continues with a three-year residency at vet school followed by exams for state veterinary board certification. Candidates for teaching and research will often go on to complete PhDs.

Education is costly. Statistics from the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) show that most equine vets are about $106,000 in debt for student loans when they receive their four-year degrees. Repayment of student loans can be deferred during some postgraduate training.

Low starting salary. Compensation for equine vets just starting out in practice is about $40,000, as opposed to a salary of more than $60,000 for new vets in small-animal practice, according to AVMA data. (A new equine vet working as an intern earns even less; in some large practices an intern’s salary is $25,000 plus housing allowance and medical and other benefits—however, student loan payments can be deferred during the internship.) This disparity evens out with time, according to AVMA figures.

Long hours. “Equine veterinarians in private practice can expect to work a five- to six-day week,” states AAEP. But the demands go on from there because horses don’t get sick or injured only from 8 to 5. Emergency farm calls can add hours to the weekdays, and a veterinarian who owns or works for a small private practice may also be on call every other night and every other weekend.

Physical demands. Whether intentionally or inadvertently, horses inflict wear and tear on their caregivers. Most equine vets accumulate their share of muscle strains and injuries from bites and kicks.

Challenges of new technology. As new diagnostic and communication technology becomes available, practitioners
will need to stay up to speed on tools that weren’t widely used during their vet school or internship years—but to which clients and new associates alike may now expect access. The price tag on many new technologies may also force all but the largest practices to prioritize, deciding which tools will pay for themselves at the local level and which can be better left to the big referral clinics and hospitals.

Still interested in equine veterinary practice? Here are the four paths open to equine veterinarians.

I. Small Mixed Practice
Private practices nationwide that treat both large and small animals far outnumber the exclusively large-animal and exclusively equine practices in the US (according to AVMA reports)—and many of those mixed practices are small; the median number of vets per mixed practice is between 2 and 2.5. Dr. Stuart Sherburne’s Ridge Runner Veterinary Services in Winterport, Maine, shares many characteristics with other small mixed practices that serve areas away from major population centers. In addition to Dr. Sherburne, who opened the practice in 1996 after graduating from Tufts University Veterinary School with a concentration in equine surgery and medicine, Ridge Runner includes a second full-time veterinarian who treats only small animals, and a part-time veterinarian.

Founding a small local mixed practice was “a lifestyle decision” for Dr. Sherburne, who had opportunities to take residencies or internships after vet school with highly regarded equine vets at top institutions. But he and his wife, Katie (who handles the business and personnel details of the practice), wanted to raise their young family in a small community with traditional values. “I don’t have any regrets,” he says.

His clinic is unusual among many comparable practices in offering complete laboratory and surgical facilities for large and small animals, as well as the latest in X-ray and ultrasound technology. But he does acknowledge difficulty finding—and keeping—new equine vets for a practice in which large-animal cases (mostly equine, plus a couple of area dairy farms) account for about 40 percent of the bottom line. “In large-animal medicine—and I don’t think this is just Maine—the trend is that people come out of vet school thinking it’s going to be romantic and rewarding, but they find it’s also dirty and difficult.”

The long hours, long distances between farm calls and frequent on-call rotation for emergencies are additional downsides for new practitioners in a small practice. “Many opt for small-animal practice after a year or two.

“New vets who aren’t from an agricultural background also have an idealistic viewpoint and don’t realize that a lot of decisions are made on an economic basis because simply owning horses is already a bit of a reach for some clients,” he adds. “It costs a lot more to treat a 1,000-pound horse with antibiotics than to treat a 10-pound cat. Or the client says, ‘No, we’re not going to do colic surgery on this horse, we’re going to euthanize it.’ That may not fit the new vet’s ideas about how medicine should be.”

To better allocate the busy practice’s resources, Dr. Sherburne and his staff have been working on a client questionnaire. The survey is designed to provide a clearer picture of clients’ priorities on services such as weekend practice hours and off-hours emergency response for both large and small animals.

II. Mid-Size Group Equine Practice
Dr. Richard Forfa has been interested in veterinary medicine since childhood. When he couldn’t get into a US vet school after graduation in 1979 from Rutgers University, he decided to enter vet school at the University of Parma in Italy rather than wait a year and reapply here. He passed the required exams for licensure in the US after graduating from Parma and later earned board certification as an equine specialist.

In 1983, after practicing at New Jersey racetracks and acquiring some mixed animal experience, he founded Monocacy Equine Veterinary Associates in Frederick County, Maryland. Today Monocacy is a five-veterinarian practice that serves a region with a large and growing sporthorse population.

A practice with several veterinarians has definite advantages, because on-call nights and weekends rotate among a larger group, Dr. Forfa explains. “As a practice gets bigger, with more veterinarians, you still work 50 or 60 hours a week because your days are long—but the quality of life improves.” There is also enough manpower in a mid-sized practice like his to supervise and train a couple of interns.

A practice of this size can only thrive
Chiropractic work is one of many in-demand services for which equine veterinarians may elect to train.

in certain parts of the US where there is a population of horses—and horse owners—that will support it. Inevitably, he says, the same locations tend to have high property values that make it difficult for a new veterinarian to afford the home or small farm he or she has in mind.

Monocacy accepts interns fresh out of vet school, and Dr. Forfa finds that the intern’s school or grade average matters less than attitude. Those most likely to succeed are “good workers with good people skills who want to work as a team. They don’t go home until you send them home and even then they find a reason to come back.” When seeking new staff veterinarians, he looks for candidates who have successfully completed internships where they were “trained by people I know at a five- or six-vet practice where they’ve had the intern out there in the trenches doing stuff, not just watching and helping.”

III. The Academic Alternative
Dr. Bonnie Rush is head of the Department of Clinical Sciences at Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine, where her work in equine immunology and in the treatment of equine respiratory disease has earned international recognition. She says that an academic veterinary career offers “lots of people to talk to with expertise in a wide range of areas” when a challenging case comes up.

She also enjoys working with veterinary students, interns, residents and advanced trainees. “They are all asking a lot of questions, pushing your knowledge base every day. It’s fun to teach, but it’s a two-way street.” The educational path to academe entails a one-year internship after graduation from vet school, then three years of residency training leading to board certification in a specialty (which in her case was equine internal medicine). Dr. Rush completed a master’s degree during her residency.

“Some people do a PhD after finishing their residency; that extra training will help them in terms of their ability to perform research as faculty.”

Most academic equine clinicians spend about half their time working with equine patients and fourth-year vet school students. Classroom teaching accounts for about 20 percent of their time, and about 30 percent goes to research that is “targeted to improving patient care or improving diagnostic testing.” This variety of responsibilities makes for “a rich and stimulating environment,” she says. A possible drawback is that the limited number of vet schools means academic candidates are “pretty limited geographically—there may not be a faculty opening at the school in the area where you’d like to live.”

For students attracted to an academic career, she offers this advice on how to increase one’s chances of being selected for the kinds of internships and residencies that contribute to success:

- Make sure that practitioners at the facility where you think you might want to go have firsthand knowledge of who you are. You will probably have to do some externships (time spent with veterinary practices during vacations or other breaks while you are still in vet school) or pay a personal visit to practices where you might want to do some advanced training later.

- Begin thinking now about clinicians in your vet school from whom you might request letters of recommendation in the future. The most effective letters come from practitioners with “name recognition” for the vets at the place where you are applying. These top practitioners will be able to write the best letters for you if you have participated early and often in events at your school with which they are involved.

- Demonstrate your ability for scholarship. As well as good grades, this means extras like participating in research projects, for example.

IV. Large Group Practice
“What we are really trying to do is match people with the opportunity to be successful,” says Dr. Andy Clark, CEO of legendary Hagyard-Davidson-McGee

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Associates in central Kentucky. The practice serves clients ranging from international breeding operations and world-class sporthorses to cherished pleasure horses, with a range of specialists and facilities unrivaled outside a university setting.

To this end, Hagyard’s “very ambitious” outreach program offers about 200 externships a year in which third- or fourth-year veterinary students spend two weeks or more with the practice. About 10 percent of these externs will return to Hagyard as interns after vet school, Dr. Clark says; with few exceptions, an externship with the practice is a prerequisite to acceptance as an intern.

“It’s quite possible for people not to be comfortable in a practice this big. We definitely want them to find that out in a two-week, rather than a one-year, visit. Obviously, we also want to be sure we’re comfortable with them.”

An important criterion in their selection is “some horse experience before they come here,” says Dr. Clark. “That could be from externships or volunteering in a clinic somewhere, or maybe working for a trainer.”

Hagyard also assigns considerable weight to intern applicants’ letters of recommendation. “We feel the people who have worked with them are the best people to tell us about that candidate.”

After completing a residency and board certification, a veterinarian may spend a year or two on staff at a university clinic before joining Hagyard as an associate in one of the specialty areas. Central Kentucky is “a challenging place in which to practice” because of its concentration of Thoroughbred breeding farms, he cautions.

“Our field-service vets work essentially nonstop for half the year; for the other half, they’re on call one night per week and one weekend per month.”

In-house staff, such as surgery and medicine veterinarians, are able to schedule regular rotations year-round. Recent vet school graduates “expect more balance, or integration, between work and life,” in Dr. Clark’s estimation. “I think that’s bringing the entire profession to look at ways to do things a little differently.”

If an aspiring veterinarian prefers hands-on work, a career in private practice offers many different options, depending in part upon location.

Horse Jobs:
Ways to work with horses and grow your equine career

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