

“The Traveling Apprentice” Works for Prince Frederick Animal Hospital

You're thinking about what you want to be when you grow up and you're considering a veterinary assistant's career because you just luv, luv, luv, luv, l-u-u-u-u-v animals of the pet variety. Well, here's a news flash: In order to be a good assistant you'd better be a good people person, too, because pets don't make appointments at the vet's office, nor do they drive themselves to a clinic: It's their caring owners who do that. And...as I observed when I spent a day as a Traveling Apprentice at the Prince Frederick Animal Hospital (PFAH) ... concerned, worried owners often require just as much nurturing as their beloved pets.

And, l-u-u-u-u-ving animals can be a short sighted motivation unless you happen to also luv, luv, luv the less glamorous parts of the job.... like cleaning up poop, getting peeped on by an anxious animal, bitten by a nervous dog, or scratched by a frantic kitten.

Or smelling some horrific odors guaranteed to offend even the most debilitated olfactory system.

PFAH's new facility was designed to offer medicine in a limited field known as "companion animal" or pet medicine, which includes small animals such as dogs, cats, and "pocket pets" such as ferrets, guinea pigs, etc. The hospital has several examination rooms, operating rooms, a recovery area, grooming area, retail area, stocked pharmacy, and a boarding area for dog and cat patients. The staff of 30 (six doctors, numerous technicians, kennel helpers, and office assistants) offer care that includes immunization, wellness care, grooming, internal medicine, dental care, surgery, radiology, micro-chipping, and pain management. The staff takes great pride in working closely with Southern Maryland animal shelters to provide shots and spaying and neutering to ready animals for adoption.

I learned the flow of events in an animal hospital, from the patient intake area to the examination rooms. I mastered the art of folding surgical drapes. I observed the treatment of a tiny Shih Tzu with infected anal glands, two cats requiring vaccines, a rescue puppy with a skin condition, a border collie with a growth in his ear, and other procedures for other assorted cats and dogs.

The only non feline or canine animals seen that that day were three small bunnies the owner needed "sexed", meaning she needed a veterinarian to tell her if she was the proud owner of three same sex bunnies, or if she needed to schedule a neutering procedure lest she begin an unplanned career in rabbit husbandry.

The best part of the day occurred when a teary eyed woman offered unsolicited praise for the doctors and the facility. That moment, Dr. Ramsey, owner of the hospital, assured me, was the reward that kept each staff person coming back each day--the knowledge that they'd been able to assist a sick animal and the bonus of seeing the joy on a relieved owner's face when she carries her cherished pet home.

That, all the staff confirmed, more than made up for all the less glamorous parts of veterinary care.



The Traveling Apprentice is a monthly column written by Carolyn McHugh, President/CEO of the Calvert County Chamber of Commerce. Each month Carolyn spends a day working for a Chamber member, then writes a column for a local newspaper about the experience. The article is later inserted into the Chamber's newsletter and posted on the Chamber's web-site in order to give the maximum exposure to the Chamber member. Her commitment to Chamber members and to the readers is that she's there for Chamber members and that whatever they do in their daily job, she'll do, too.