

the NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA • COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE
veterinary
page



Student profile

For one-time Eclipse Award winner and former jockey Ramon Perez, greatest achievement is education



Ramon Perez is shown riding Prado's Mystique to a win at Canterbury Park in Minnesota on July 3, 2000. The 1 1/16 mile race on turf carried a \$13,000 purse. Perez rode in Minnesota for a summer after years on the New York circuit.

BY SARAH CAREY

When the TV series “Jockeys” ran on Animal Planet two years ago, senior University of Florida veterinary student Ramon Perez was quite the hot commodity with his classmates. That’s because for a three-year window in the 1990s, Perez himself was one of the biggest names in Thoroughbred horse racing.

“My classmates usually ask me things like, ‘what’s it like,’ or ‘what’s this mean,’” said Perez, now 32 and preparing for an internship at an equine practice near Sydney, Australia. “If you see a TV show for one afternoon, it can be confusing.”

In 1995 alone, Perez raked in more than \$4.6 million in purses, competing on the tough New York circuit. That year, at 18 years of age, Perez received the prestigious Eclipse Award for best apprentice jockey after falling three votes short of winning the same award a year earlier.

The late John Harrell, a highly regarded columnist for the Thoroughbred Times and Louisville Courier Journal, wrote that the Perez’ performance riding Northern Emerald in the 1995 Flower Bowl may have been Perez’s “defining moment of the season.”

“Known as a patient rider who often comes in from off the pace – though he prefers to place his horses in a stalking position – Perez brought Northern Emerald from far back, coming from 3 ½ lengths back in midstretch to win by a length over Danish,” Harrell wrote. “It was a special victory for Perez, since the 6-year-old mare is trained by (Bill) Mott and owned by Hiram C. Polk, Jr. and David Richardson, longtime clients of Mott.”

“It was the most special race of the year for me, because it was for Mr. Mott and those gentlemen,” said Perez, who was associated with Mott’s stable because his stepfather, Tim Jones, was Mott’s assistant trainer.

“We were tough to beat,” Perez said. “We had great horses; we won Breeders Cups and even as a kid, before I could ride, I had access to some of the most well bred horses in the world.”

Mott, who is generally regarded as one of America’s best trainers, said he remembered escorting Perez around one morning on one of the first Thoroughbreds he got to gallop. He also remembers taking him to one of the small training tracks at Saratoga Race Course, where Perez rode well, “whether it was a good race or a bad race.”

“It was satisfying for me to put somebody on a horse and go with them and have them do so well from the beginning,” Mott said. “He won a Grade 1 stake for us at Belmont (the 1995 Flower Bowl) when he still had the apprentice allowance, which was quite unusual, but that just shows the confidence I had in him, number one, and number two, the confidence that he had in himself to win a race like that.”

Perez won the first two races he ever rode in, at Churchill Downs on a filly named Alittle Grace and a gelding named Brief the Chief. He raced and won at Aqueduct, Belmont Park, and Saratoga Race Course while on the New York circuit.

Perez’s pink apprentice jockey certificate contains his hand-written record of wins with

dates, tracks and horses, beginning with Alittle Grace in 1994. A 1997 New York Racing Association calendar shows Perez grinning in a group shot of some of the other best jockeys in the sport, including Hall of Famer’s Pat Day, Mike Smith, Julie Krone, John Velasquez, Jerry Bailey and others.

Smith was Perez’s idol. The “Jockeys” star, who won the Kentucky Derby in 2005 on Giacomo and recently placed third on Jackson Bend in the Preakness Stakes, said Perez was like a son to him in the jockey room.

“He had a very short, but a great career,” Smith said. “He was just a great kid, and respected. But we had a lot of fun. He was so naïve; he’d believe anything you told him. It was always ‘yes sir’ and ‘no sir.’”

Disney Adventures, a children’s magazine, featured then-17-year-old Perez in an article titled “Horse Sense,” describing him as one of the country’s best young jockeys. Encased in a plastic sleeve is his jockey trading card, full of career statistics used for autograph-signing sessions or in bicycle spokes of countless collectors.

Because of his longtime association with Mott’s stable and family ties to the industry – his father, also named Ramon Perez, was a jockey who rode at numerous racetracks in the Midwest and along the East Coast in the 1970s — Perez gained access and valuable connections.

“I worked 12 hours days when I was 10 years old,” Perez said. “You couldn’t get me away from the horses.”

He worked his way up, from hotwalker to groom to exercise rider. Perez learned everything there was to know and was always hungry to learn more. At 14, he was galloping horses on the track – which, he admits, was technically illegal.

“You’re supposed to be 18 and have a license to ride in New York, but because I grew up on those tracks, everyone knew me and no one would put me in a spot where I was on a bad horse,” Perez said.

In those days, track security would visit the stable to ensure compliance. When that happened, his parents would put him in the car, or he’d go hide out in the barn.

“I couldn’t be seen as an employee,” he said.

As a groom, he mucked out stalls, cleaned water buckets and was “basically in charge of the horse’s well being,” Perez said. “You’re a mini-trainer; you have to check for subtle changes in their joints. I remember Bill and my stepdad would look at the legs of every single horse each morning before training. They instilled in me the whole physical exam thing, although I didn’t know it at the time.”

All his experience doing various jobs in the barn contributed to Perez’s almost uncanny sense of being able to understand the subtleties of each animal.

“It’s similar to vet med,” Perez said. “The clinicians tell you to look at the whole horse before you even examine what is wrong. Hall of Fame jockey Gary Stephens, who starred in the movie Seabiscuit, once said to me that a trainer caught him looking down at the legs in the paddock and told him, ‘son, don’t look down at the legs. You’ll never let him run if you do.’”

A jockey’s job is to ride fast, Perez said.

“But if you don’t know anything more than that, you’re losing the whole connection and you might not recognize the subtleties you should be picking up on.”

A trip to the zoo

(see full story on CVM's VOICE club on p.8)



VOICE member Santiago Diaz visits with one of the young people who visited the Santa Fe zoo May 1 during a trip VOICE members made available to them free of charge.



Members of a Gainesville youth program were treated to a trip to the Santa Fe Zoo May 1 by members of the CVM's VOICE club recently. Here, the group listens to VOICE club members talk about what to expect during the zoo visit.

Clinical program coordinator receives prestigious universitywide Superior Accomplishment Award



UF President Bernie Machen, left, and Peter Maren, representing Willis HRH, stand with universitywide Superior Accomplishment Winner Megan Elliott during an April 21 ceremony honoring all the university-level winners.

Megan Elliot, a clinical programs coordinator at the UF College of Veterinary Medicine's Small Animal Hospital, received one of the university's highest honors this year as a recipient of the Willis HRH Employee Recognition Award.

Sponsored by Willis HRH of Gainesville, winners of the award received a commemorative plaque and \$1,000.

One letter nominating Elliot for the award cited her "persistence and dedication to her employees and her responsibilities." Elliot was instrumental in developing the career ladder test to allow the promotion of veterinary technicians.

Winners were honored April 21 at a ceremony held at the Reitz Union.

Commencement exercises for the Class of 2010 are May 29

Commencement exercises for the UF CVM's Class of 2010 will be held at 2 p.m. at the UF Phillips Center for the Performing Arts.

The DVM's Distinguished Award winners will also be honored during the ceremony, and the class selected Dr. Michael Schaer, professor of emergency medicine and critical care and special assistant to the dean, to deliver the commencement address.

A reception will be held at the Touchdown Terrace following the ceremony.

Veterinary student takes top award in category for research presentation at American Heartworm Society meeting

Sophomore veterinary student Kiri Dunn received top honors for the best research poster presentation by a resident or student at the 13th Triennial Symposium of the American Heartworm Society, held in Memphis on April 17.

Dunn's research project, titled "Heartworm Testing, Treatment and Prevention Protocols for Cats in Animal Shelters," was conducted last summer during a research fellowship with Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program at UF and the Merck Merial Scholars Program.

"Kiri's research showed that animal shelters are struggling to meet the needs of cats in terms of heartworm prevention and diagnosis," said Julie Levy, D.V.M., Ph.D., the Maddie's Professor of Shelter Medicine at UF. "She found that although some shelter managers were confused about the risk of heartworm infections in cats, most wanted to do more, even though they felt constrained by the costs associated with meeting the guidelines recommended for pet cats."

Levy added that Dunn's research documented that there is a compelling need for humane agencies, veterinarians and industry representatives to work together to better meet the needs of the 3-4 million cats that enter animal shelters each year.

Dunn's classmate, Kathleen Colby, was also recognized for her outstanding research relating to canine protocols in animal shelters.



Kiri Dunn, at center in white coat, is surrounded by her family members following the Professional Coating Ceremony on May 6.

Duly coated

Members of the Class of 2012 were honored May 6 at the CVM's traditional Professional Coating Ceremony, held at UF's Phillips Center for the Performing Arts. The ceremony acknowledges completion of the first two years of veterinary school, and provides an opportunity for students to be presented by their mentors with the new white coats that symbolize the students' transition into clinical rotations.



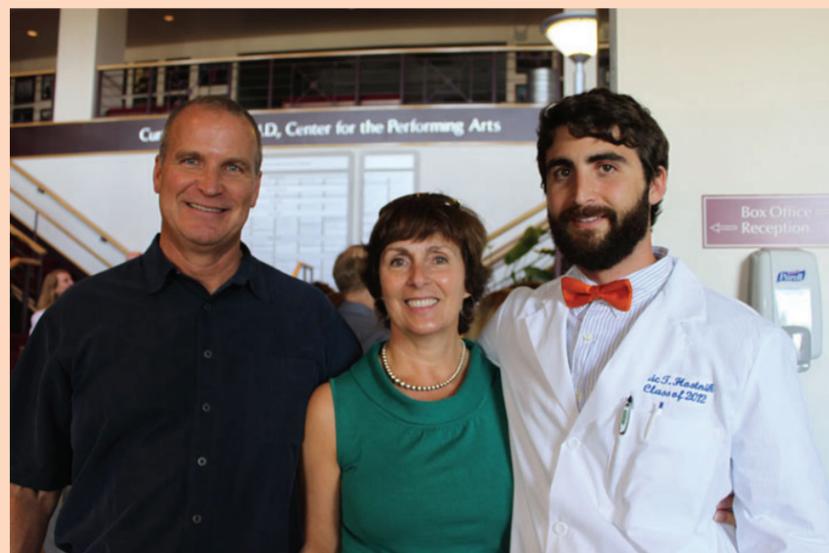
Dr. Ray Mobley assists Megan Brown with donning her new white coat.



Morgan Menasco, left, exits the stage followed by her coat presenter, Dr. Rick Alleman.



Jared Jaffey, center, with his mom at left and Dr. Heather Wamsley, his coat presenter.



Eric Hostnik, right, is pictured with his parents following the coating ceremony.



Dr. Moody McCall, one of the coat presenters, shakes Dr. Jim Kanzler's hand as he exits the stage with Sloane, a service dog in training.



Bo Rainbow, second from right, is shown with his coat presenter, Dr. Kevin Anderson, second from left, and Bo's parents following the coating ceremony.

Around the college

Physiological sciences professor is founding editor-in-chief of new journal

Dr. Paul Davenport, professor of physiological sciences at the UF CVM, has been selected to serve as founding editor-in-chief of a new professional journal.

The journal, *Frontiers in Respiratory Physiology*, is an international, free-access publication that is part of a family of *Frontiers* journals dealing with physiology. However, there are only two other respiratory physiology-specific journals, Davenport said.

"I am assembling the editorial team and wrote the mission statement," he said. "It's exciting to make this new informational outlet for those working in this area."

Davenport said the journal would begin accepting articles in June or July with a projected first publication due out by October of this year.

"It is a lot of fun to lay the foundation of a new journal, and I have a great group of associate editors working with me on this project."



Dr. Paul Davenport

CVM faculty visit University of Uruguay to provide continuing education to bovine practitioners, veterinary and graduate students



Dr. Robert Gibson, Dr. Claus Buergelt and Dr. Carlos Risco are shown at the University of Uruguay, Montevideo.

Dr. Carlos Risco and Claus Buergelt recently returned from a four-day trip to Montevideo, Uruguay.

Risco, a professor of food animal medicine and reproduction, and Buergelt, a professor emeritus of anatomical pathology, were invited to conduct a continuing education course in bovine reproduction at the University of Uruguay's College of Veterinary Medicine.

Risco and Buergelt, along with Dr. Robert Gibson, a professor of large animal medicine at Cornell University, lectured to bovine practitioners, graduate and veterinary students, and in addition, conducted wet labs.

The group's host was Professor Daniel Cavestany, of the veterinary faculty's department of reproduction, University of Uruguay, Montevideo.

The Veterinary Page is the UF College of Veterinary Medicine's monthly electronic internal newsletter. Please send stories to Sarah Carey at careysk@vetmed.ufl.edu.

PEREZ, FROM P.1

Perez's stellar rise to the top ranks of Thoroughbred racing came at a price, however. He struggled to keep his weight down but there was only so much he could do to stop his natural growth progression.

After three years of intense riding, Perez retired and did something he'd always wanted to do more of and never had time to – he traveled. He backpacked in Europe, and worked in Dubai and England, where he rode briefly at a stable owned by Sheik Mohammed.

"My problem was, I started at the top and there is very little availability to ride when you start that high," Perez said. "My career wasn't going as well as it used to be."

He returned to Florida, where his parents spent the winters, and finished a year of community college. His mother knew he wasn't happy and told him he should return to riding if that's where his passion was.

"So I started at Tampa Bay Downs and had an exceptional first season there," Perez said. "I was in the top 10 and won like 30 races. My goal was never to go back to the big tracks but to stay at smaller tracks and have fun, to remember why I was riding and why I loved it."

Perez left Tampa to ride the summer in Minnesota, where his mother is from, and rode for a few more months until facing the fact he was physically and emotionally drained due to extreme weight loss.

Some days, Perez would lose as much as 8 pounds a day in water weight by sweating in a "hot box" – a sauna – or a steam room, taking laxatives, not eating or drinking; whatever it took to make weight to compete. On good days, he might only have to shed 2 to 4 pounds.

Perez's "aha moment" was March 26, 2001 at a small Arizona track where he was scheduled to ride the first and last races of the day, with six and a half hours in between. He won the first race, which paid him a mere \$180. Perez, all 114 pounds of him, was miserable.

"I completely didn't care," Perez said. "I had to sit in the jock's room and I couldn't eat or drink because I had to make weight for the last race. I just wanted a sip of Gatorade. So I sat in my cubby, and I said, 'I'm done.' After I won that race at 12:30 p.m., I took off."

Soon after Perez left the track, his grandmother asked him what he planned to do with his life. Perez said he had no idea.

"She said my grandfather always wanted me to go to college and thought I was smart enough to pursue an education," Perez said.

He applied to and was accepted at Arizona State University, where he spent a year before transferring back to Gainesville to finish his AA degree at Santa Fe College. He went on to complete his bachelor's degree in history – the discipline his grandfather had been a professor in – at UF and subsequently took prerequisite courses to apply to veterinary school.

"My grandfather and I both loved history," Perez said. "He used to tell me he'd seen so many people go through classes, majoring in something they didn't really enjoy because they thought it would pay them the most. He told me the kids that actually succeeded the most majored in things they loved."

Perez's back-up plan was to do a master's degree in history and pursue that interest if he didn't get into veterinary school.

"A lot of our students major in animal science and that's a great degree, but I felt I already had so much horse experience that I wanted to study something that would make me better or different," he said.

Veterinary school was a challenge, but Perez was used to overcoming the odds. Before he became one of the most successful jockeys working in the 1990s, some people told him he'd never ride because he'd be too big. Even one of the stories in his scrapbook carries the headline, "Growing up Bugs Perez." It was a play on words, as apprentice jockeys are known in the business as bug boys.

The story, by Bill Finley of the *New York Daily News*, starts off:

"He is just 17 and wonders if his best days are behind him. That's the way it is when the body might outgrow the job."

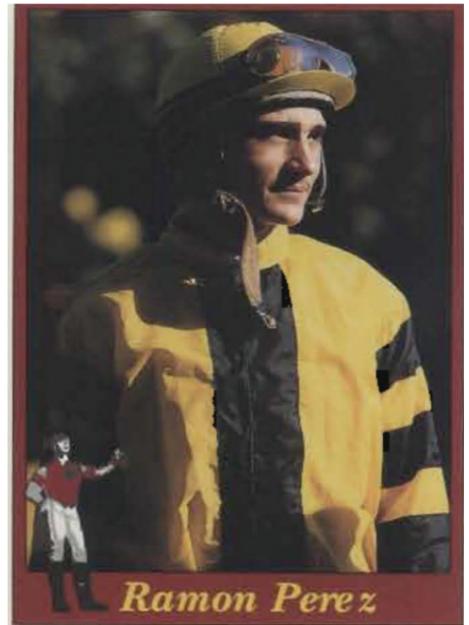
The article goes on to call Perez "the most successful apprentice to ride in New York since the days of Wesley Ward, who won everything in sight in 1984 and 1985."

One award Perez is proudest of, however, is his General Educational Development certificate, which he calls his "badge of honor." He received the GED, a high school equivalency diploma, after dropping out of secondary school to pursue his jockey career.

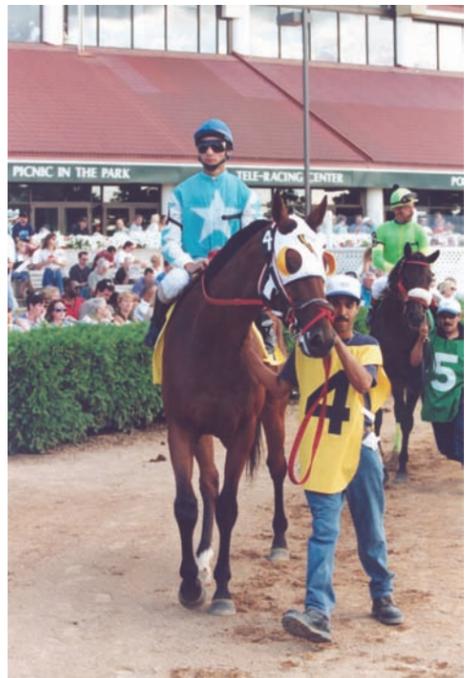
"I always felt like I probably wasn't smart enough," he said. "I struggle with learning from books, but if you show me and teach me hands-on, I'm much better."

After he receives his D.V.M. degree, Perez will head for Randwick Equine Center outside of Sydney, Australia. He performed an externship there and liked the opportunities he saw in surgery, lameness cases and even an ambulatory racetrack practice.

"My upbringing was unique in that we traveled every three months with the horses," Perez



Ramon Perez, shown in one of three jockey cards that were issued in his name.



Ramon Perez approaches the racetrack at the \$100,000 Emerald Stakes, a 1 1/16 mile race on grass in 2000. He won the race on his mount, P.D. Lucky.



Ramon Perez, left, and his friend, Chad Anderson, who later became his agent, make their way to the unsaddling area after a race.



Drew Scarborough, left, and classmate Ramon Perez are shown during the senior exit luncheon on April 27.

PEREZ, FROM P.4

said. “I moved to 12 different schools at least when I was a kid, so the idea of picking up and moving has never been an issue.”

He hopes his next adventure will help him decide whether to pursue a residency in surgery and perhaps continue on with a career that would take him back to the horse business as a racetrack veterinarian. Perez admits that not a day goes by, particularly during racing season, that he doesn’t miss the thrill of riding.

Hall of Fame trainer Mott said that he knew Perez might feel he was shorted on his opportunity to continue his riding career due to the size of his body

“He put up a good battle, but I think he will grow to appreciate and love what he’s doing,” Mott said. “I think when you ride horses, it’s such a special bond that you create with the

animal. Just having the challenge to get along with each and every horse that you get on and learning their characteristics and how to get them to do their best. It’s a satisfying experience when you know you’ve done a good job at it, but I think he’ll have to appreciate the animal from another perspective.”

After Perez stopped riding, now a decade ago, it was three years before he could even go near a racetrack. He tries to remember his love for horses, focus on the fact that he won with his final mount, and remind himself he still has time to figure out the rest of his life.

“When you boil it down, I rode for a year at small tracks for very little money and I loved basically everything from the gate to the wire,” Perez said. “All the other stuff, the political stuff, you have to jump through hoops. But once I got to the gate, it was me and the horse and my instincts. It’s a fun game at that point and that was what I loved about it.”

Student profile

Graduating senior spreads new professional wings with veterinary future

BY SARAH CAREY

Kelli Marlar gets by on more than just a wing and a prayer. As someone who worked 19 years as an air traffic controller in Miami and is a licensed pilot with instrument rating, Marlar was no stranger to hard work and responsibility. Yet she couldn’t sacrifice professional employment just to go to school — even veterinary school.

When Marlar, now 46, finally was admitted to UF’s College of Veterinary Medicine in 2005 after several previously unsuccessful attempts, she was ecstatic. Becoming a veterinarian was her ultimate goal and dream.

“I had taken the prerequisites and volunteered at Hollywood Animal Hospital for four years,” she said.

She rented out her house in Pembroke Pines and moved upstate to Gainesville, where she had arranged for a work transfer from Miami to Gainesville. She worked full time at Gainesville Regional Airport her first two years of veterinary school.

“I’m a person who has to be on the go all the time, and I actually really enjoyed being an air traffic controller,” Marlar said. “However, I felt there was a void in my life, and I wanted to go back to school.”

What she found at UF was a different language, and a program that requires memorization as well as analytical skills. Memorizing classroom material was difficult, whereas Marlar – both in her work life and as a physics major in undergraduate school at Florida International University – was used to aviation terms and problem solving.

“I didn’t know what not working was like, and felt the need to keep working,” she said. “I would literally have to be two places at one time. I was someplace every single day. I’d work Thursday and Friday evenings, Saturday during the day and then Sunday the same time. Then I’d go back to work on Sunday to work the overnight shift.”

Only on test days at the college would Marlar not work the night before.

Eventually she decided she had to focus on her studies, but credits her air traffic controller career with giving her the financial means and discipline to follow through and complete the D.V.M. degree.

As a sophomore, Marlar served as treasurer of SCAVMA and as treasurer and founding member of the Student Chapter of the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior.

She loves gourmet cooking, scuba diving, traveling and biking but she still dreams of returning to flying one day. Her last flight was five years ago in Opalocka, Fla., in a single-engine cessna.

“It was kind of like my last flying hurrah, since I knew I would not be able to fly or afford it while I was in vet school,” Marlar said.

But she’d love to return to flying one day, and maybe even own her own airplane.

“I love the airshow and everything about flying,” Marlar said.

In 2001, Marlar was named Air Traffic Controller of the Year at the Lakeland Sun and Fun airshow. She also was air traffic controller at the Oshkosh EAA Airshow that same year.

Her favorite airplane is the P51D Mustang, which she has ridden in several times.

“Any true aviator will know this airplane,” said Marlar, who was born and raised in Miami. Her first job was fueling airplanes out of Tamiami airport, where she also worked at the flight desk.

After graduation from the UF veterinary college, Marlar will return to familiar territory in South Florida to perform an internship at Hollywood Animal Hospital.

“Then I’ll probably segue into private practice,” Marlar said. “The real learning starts when you’re in the real world,” she said. “People did think I was crazy to give up such a well paid profession. Now I’ll be in debt. But you’re never too old to do what you really want to do in life.”



Kelli Marlar

Congratulations to our new graduate degree recipients

We have several new graduate degree recipients we need to acknowledge and extend congratulations to.

The following individuals received degrees during UF commencement ceremonies, held May 1 at the Stephen C. O’Connell Center:

Master of Science degree (with thesis): Kim Goldbach, Department of Small Animal Clinical Sciences.

Ph.D. degree: Melissa Bourgeois and Carolina Perez-Heydrich (Department of Infectious Diseases and Pathology) and Tameka Phillips (Department of Large Animal Clinical Sciences.)

Master’s in Forensic Toxicology Degree (non-thesis/Web-based): Noelle Feldbauer, Steven Fleming, Denise Gilbertson and Darcy Miller.

Student profile

Nursing career and research interests strengthened student's resume, offered grounding and income during veterinary school

BY SARAH CAREY

When Mary Clinton, 42, started veterinary school at the University of Florida in 2006, she already was a registered nurse with a job at Shands, and a master of science degree well underway. With her nursing degree, she knew she could get a job anywhere, but along the way, she'd paid a few dues: working as a bartender, as barn help, as a bank teller. She'd even worked in telephone installation and repair service.

"Yes, I actually climbed poles and was the only female in my district doing so," said Clinton, who hails from New Jersey and admits to wanting to be a veterinarian from an early age. "It was at that point that I realized I wanted to do something more important, more meaningful. So I applied to a local college for undergraduate school and I loved it."

She eventually transferred to the University of Pennsylvania, and did well enough to be named to its scholars program. She contemplated medical school and even applied, but didn't get in. At that point Clinton returned to New Jersey, and to her original plan of becoming a veterinarian.

She began working for a local veterinary practice, then moved to Oradell Animal Hospital, a referral practice that would afford ample opportunities for hands-on experience.

"I was quickly learning more and more," she said. "Oradell was great because if you had initiative and showed promise, they would cross-train you as a technician. I quickly learned all the positions: Internal medicine, surgery, anesthesia, dentistry, radiology and the float/treatment job. It worked for the practice, because I could fill in for anyone and was flexible."

After two years at Oradell, Clinton passed the technician examination and began preparing to apply to veterinary school. She zeroed in on Ohio and Florida as her two options, and decided to move to Florida – "the easiest decision of the whole process." Soon after, she became interested in research, working for a UF behavioral neuroscientist.

Clinton landed an interview and a place on the CVM applicant waiting list.

She didn't get in. It felt like the door so close to being opened, had closed in her face.

"I was so frustrated and quite a bit angry. I thought about reapplying, but then thought I might never get in. Then I started looking at other options."

Her mother is a nurse, as was her roommate, and a few neighbors and friends.

"They always had great jobs, made good money and could go anywhere and get a job," Clinton said. "Plus, it was like being a vet tech, except for people and you get paid a whole lot more."

In 2004, UF was offering a new program – an accelerated second BS degree in nursing, for students who already held bachelor's degrees.

"With three days to the deadline to apply, I got my application done and had my letters of recommendation in on time. And I got in, even without an interview. I was one of only 28 students out of 300 applicants who did...or so they said."

She continued to hold her job in a research laboratory at UF. But halfway through the nursing program, Clinton still had the veterinary medicine bug.

"I was still a little bitter, but after some struggling, I figured, what the heck," she said. "I loved veterinary medicine and I needed to let go of that anger and just do it."

On her second attempt, Clinton finally was accepted to veterinary school. Her dream had come true, but with nursing school still not yet completed, she was thinking ahead.

"I had eight weeks between graduation from nursing school and starting vet school," she said. "I wanted a nursing position at Shands, but they required eight weeks of working full time before you could be a part-time employee."

She worked that out, and by the end of the summer of 2005, Clinton was working full time as a registered nurse. Then she received a letter from the veterinary college offering an opportunity for graduate school, with paid tuition and a nice stipend.

Clinton decided that the experience she had gained working in a UF research lab, where she studied taste and the neurological pathways involved in the healing and manipulation of nerves, could afford an interesting opportunity to pick up a master's degree.

"I went to the vet school administration with my proposition, and they were thrilled I had an interest in a field outside of veterinary medicine, but still involved with animals," Clinton said. So she delayed veterinary school for another year, while she worked toward her master's degree, all the while working as a nurse to support herself.

She was quite happy with the way things all turned out.

"If I hadn't taken the year off for graduate school, I never would have met my husband," Clinton said, adding that she and her husband met through a veterinary school friend.

When Clinton entered veterinary school as a freshman, she was working half time at Shands. After about a year, she transferred to central staffing, where she could work as needed on every floor but not have to commit her hours in advance. She continued to work as a nurse throughout her veterinary student career.

"It sure beats flipping burgers for a part time job," Clinton said. "I work on all the floors and see different patients on every shift and I know staff from all over the hospital. They always greet me with a warm embrace when I get to the floor. It has been a great experience overall, and an insight to the nuances between human and veterinary medicine."

Her nursing experience has also driven home the reasons why Clinton is ready to shift from human to veterinary medicine as her full time career.

"I know in my heart that I belong in veterinary medicine, and for now it is there I will make my career," Clinton said.

This summer, Clinton plans to begin working at a mixed animal practice in Bunnell. She hopes to complete her master's degree no later than next fall.



Mary Clinton and her horse, Kong.



Congratulations and best wishes all members of the Class of 2010 from all of us at the UF CVM and UF Veterinary Hospitals!

Fins for Fur fishing tournament is June 12

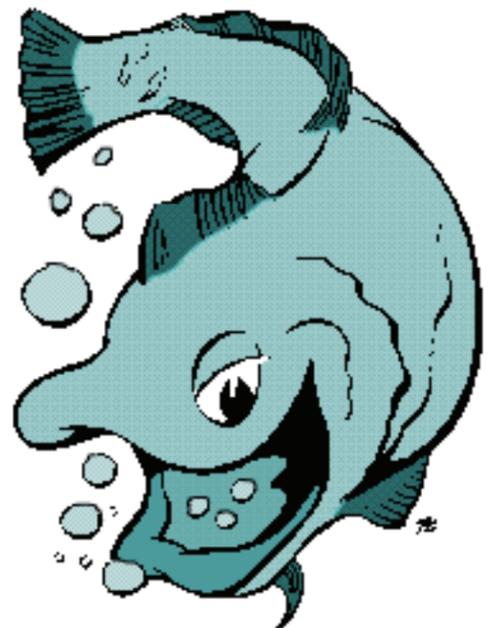
Clinicians from the University of Florida's College of Veterinary Medicine will be casting their rods June 12 in Cedar Key to benefit special needs pets at a "Fins for Fur" charity fishing tournament in Cedar Key.

Anyone interested in participating may register to compete in three categories: Redfish, Spanish Mackerel and Trout. All support and contributions will go toward the UF Veterinary Hospitals' Pet Samaritan Fund.

The fund is used exclusively to help treat special needs animals that also offer teaching opportunities for veterinary students. Patients that are eligible are either ownerless or owned by clients who have extenuating financial circumstances. To be considered eligible for funding support, such animals would be deemed to be in need of life-saving procedures.

The first-ever event was conceived of by Dr. Carsten Bandt, an assistant professor of emergency and critical care at UF's College of Veterinary Medicine. Bandt likes to fish, so he approached several of his colleagues with the idea of creating a fishing tournament as a means to involve the public in their effort to raise funds and bring awareness to the situation many owners and animal face during these difficult economic times.

For more information, call Bandt at 352-258-1930 or e-mail him at bandtc@ufl.edu.



It's that time of year again: Offshore students celebrate completion of clinical rotations; student ambassadors are acknowledged for yearlong volunteer efforts and seniors give feedback about student life and curriculum at annual exit luncheons. Here are just a few shots from those events.



Beth Gibson from Ross is shown with UF Small Animal Hospital radiology technician Philip Buchyn.



Paula Lenhard, from Ross University, shows off her certificate of completion.



Senior students Angela Avok, left, and Stephanie King give each other a hug prior to sitting down for lunch, which was prepared this year by Omi Risco -- wife of Dr. Carlos Risco.



Lynette Chaparro, right, from the CVM's Office for Students and Instruction, stands in line for food with senior UF veterinary students Gary Clark and Gregg Merritt on April 27, 2010 during one of two Senior Exit Luncheons held at the college.



Stacey West and Lauren Unger, both from the Class of 2012, show off their certificates of recognition during a reception held for the CVM's student ambassadors.



Genevieve Mendoza Perez, left, an administrative assistant in the alumni affairs office, stands with Angela Avok and Laura Seheult during a recognition reception held for the CVM student ambassadors in May.

Veterinary students aim to promote professional diversity by serving as role models for disadvantaged youth

BY SARAH CAREY

By giving hands-on presentations about animal health at local schools and even partnering with a Gainesville high-risk youth organization, a group of University of Florida veterinary students hope to motivate underprivileged area youth to pursue their career dreams.

“My children were very excited when Van Brass and Tyrell Kahan (both from the UF College of Veterinary Medicine’s Class of 2011) came into the room,” said Janet Walters, a first grade teacher at Rawlings Elementary.

“Oooohs and aaahhs spread as they walked in with the small dog on a leash,” Walters said. “When they got to listen to the dog’s heartbeat, I could see the wonder on their faces. Maybe we will have a vet in the future from this experience.”

Brass and Kahan are members of the UF chapter of the veterinary student club known as VOICE – Veterinary Students as One in Culture and Ethnicity. In its first year, the group held food and clothing drives for low-income Gainesville residents. This year, the group’s focus has been on direct community outreach.

Both Brass and Kahan are African-American, which enabled Rawlings teachers to offer an example of diversity to their students.

“We actually visited two schools within the past month and gave a presentation on veterinary medicine,” said Kahan, who heads up the community outreach component of the club. “We also developed a pamphlet that talks about how to give your dog a checkup at home, how often to do checkups and when to take your dog to the vet.”

During the school presentations, VOICE members showed kids what a stethoscope is and, using a dog that belongs to one of the members, demonstrated how to check a pet’s eyes and mouth.

VOICE members Lien d’Hespeel and Brandon Culbertson, both from the Class of 2011, also took part in school presentations and member Santiago Diaz, Class of 2011, and Kahan co-ordinated a trip to the Santa Fe Teaching Zoo May 1 for kids in the Youth Attack Program. Spearheaded by Harvest Baptist Worship Center pastor Arthur Clark, the program began in Gainesville in 2003 and ministers to teenagers within low income neighborhoods.

“We now have 47 teens who participate in the program,” said Clark. “These are kids who have been having problems at school, and we now have 25 after-school tutors from UF who come out to Linton Oaks to work with them. One of the moms who has a grandson attending the program knew someone who worked at the vet school, and that led to me getting in contact with the vet students.”

Experiences such as the zoo trip contribute to community awareness and the ability to understand the importance of making positive decisions in life, Clark said.

“As I was growing up, I was fortunate to be able to go to a good school and always have food on my table,” said Diaz, who from an early age performed community outreach in his home country of Colombia. “However, it was hard for me to see how other people did not have all these privileges just because of the place they were born, what they looked like or simply by misfortune.”

Diaz added that in Colombia, many kids are told that they will never be able to go to school and that they must start work at an early age.

“No one gives them an opportunity to succeed in life and I was greatly affected by this,” he said.

“Diversity is not just about race. Diversity also comes in many other forms, including ethnic, socioeconomic and educational background, sexual orientation and religion. We just hope to be able to inform people about the different ways to achieve diversity, outside of race.” — Van Brass, Class of 2012

When Santiago came to the states five years ago, he was surprised to see that there were only a handful of students from ethnic minorities as part of the CVM student body.

“As time passed, I soon realized that something similar happens in this country, in that there is a cultural stigma for people from minorities to just be happy with having a seven-day job that pays enough to live well,” Diaz said. “However, I like to inspire kids and teach them that we are all equal and we have the same opportunities that anyone else has.”

Diaz added, “I like for them to see that if I was able to get accepted into a graduate program, living for the past five years in this country and with English being my second language, they can do even greater things.”

Brass and Kahan both said that growing up, they knew no African American veterinarians, nor did they have any conception of veterinary medicine as a career they could aspire to.

“From the standpoint of being African American, people can tell you that you can do this or that, but it’s much more difficult to imagine if you can’t see it,” Kahan said. “I used to go back to my high school and give presentations about going to UF, but I spent the whole time convincing them that they could go to UF.”

He said he believes many at-risk young people don’t graduate from high school, much less pursue additional educational goals, simply because they don’t believe they can.

“To show them someone who is actually doing it can give them a little more hope that they can do it themselves,” Kahan said.

VOICE’s president, Brass, like other group members, said community service has long been an important part of his life. He learned about the national VOICE group, which originally started at Cornell in 2006, and also that UF did not have a VOICE chapter.

“So I created one,” Brass said, adding that presently the group has about a dozen members. “Our basic tenets are community service and diversity in veterinary medicine.”

“I think people in the veterinary profession aren’t 100 percent aware of the lack of diversity. We push through and don’t look around sometimes,” Brass said. “UF has made some



Veterinary students Brandon Culbertson, Lien d’Hespeel and Van Brass gave a presentation on animal health care recently to Alachua County elementary school students.

strides, but there’s still a lot of work to be done.”

The community food drive Brass organized on behalf of the group last year supplied enough clothes and food for 300 people.

“We’ve had some challenges and it’s tough for vet students who are trying to complete a rigorous curriculum to do outside things. Santiago and Tyrell have really revved things up,” Brass said.

He emphasized that the VOICE group welcomes additional participation and support from all their classmates, whether from a minority ethnic background or not.

When people hear ‘diversity’, they hear ‘race.’ Diversity is not just about race,” Brass said. “Diversity also comes in many other forms, including ethnic, socioeconomic and educational background, sexual orientation and religion. We just hope to be able to inform people about the different ways to achieve diversity, outside of race.”

Anyone seeking more information about VOICE may contact Brass jayzcowboy@ufl.edu.



Lien d’Hespeel shows Alachua schoolchildren how to check a cat for obvious health problems.

Commencement is May 29

Come join us in wishing the best to the Class of 2010! Commencement exercises for the class will be held at 2 p.m. at the UF Phillips Center for the Performing Arts.

Distinguished Award winners for 2010 will be given and Dr. Michael Schaeer will deliver the commencement address.

Hope to see you there!