Pet Edition

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Meet the eight visitation therapy dogs of WVU

BY LARA BONATESTA
CULTURE EDITOR

It’s not uncommon to see dogs around campus at WVU but did you know that there are actually some dogs working on campus? Hearts of Gold is a service dog training program housed in WVU’s Davis College that trains and provides service dogs for free for veterans with mobility or psychiatric disabilities such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Currently at West Virginia University, Hearts of Gold has eight visitation therapy dogs that brighten the lives of students and staff on campus. Their names are Ryder, Lily, Omega, Lucas, Rigatoni, Heidi, Titan and Ruby.

“T...
In 2011 Crystal Smith, director of the equine studies minor, came to West Virginia University and worked with her peers to revise the curriculum of what was then known as the equine management minor.

Smith believes that horses are a vehicle for teaching life skills, and success with a horse is directly related to the positive relationship that is formed with it. "I just think, by nature, working with animals gives you a unique skill set," she said.

Students that work on the farms are developing those skills at an accelerated rate. "They’re animals that need to be cared for multiple times a day," Smith said. "They don’t take care of themselves, and I think it really teaches a student to manage their time well."

Attention to detail comes with the particular needs of the animals. "Pay attention to detail, because there’s so much. It’s not just like, ‘Are they healthy? But it’s ‘Are they healthy? Are they fit? Are they in good condition?’ Does their plan work?" Smith said.

"When I got here we went through and looked at what employers were really wanting, and where our students from WVU tend to really thrive. And that’s when we revised the curriculum into those three career focused tracks," Smith explained.

Students will take courses designed for their career goals in any of the three tracks. "So now students will complete a minor in Equine Studies, and one interested in veterinary medicine, veterinary medicine, or veterinary assisting. And therapy based on those career goals," said Smith.

Similar to tracks in major programs, students work through core courses then are free to choose courses based on their specific career goal. "Smith noted that this makes a student more marketable at graduation."

"Equine Science and Equine Management students tend to end up in either veterinary school, they tend to go into farm management, and we have a pretty good track record of getting students employed on thoroughbred farms," Smith explained.

"We have students that may go into sales and marketing, so they might work as a rep for an animal health pharmaceutical company, an equine feed company, so working in sales in a technical role within those career paths. Then we have students who’ve ended up in government jobs, USDA jobs, extension, things like that." Students on the assisted activities track include psychological students and other clinical majors. Some students may go into a trade such as occupational therapy or physical therapy.

"Students can also work with the horses as a modality for therapy. The program offers competitive equestrian teams, a career focused equine club and volunteering opportunities with partnering organizations."

Smith said opportunities include a working student program, internships, things like that. "Smith explained how these travel opportunities enlighten students about how diverse and large the horse industry is and the employer opportunities that are within it."

Smith says that these travel experiences are something the program will be circling back to soon. The equine studies program will be hosting the Intercollegiate Horse Shows Association (IHSA) semi finals for the western equestrian teams on March 19, March 20, 2022.

The national qualifying event for IHSA Nationals will have about 90 riders competing. This event will take place in the spring at West Virginia.

For more information on the program or the event, contact Crystal Smith at Crystal. Smith@mail.wvu.edu.

WVU zoology professor educates community with room full of insects

Researchers at WVU are educating students and members of the community with a room full of insects.

The University’s Arthropod museum and Insect Zoo, located in the Agricultural Sciences building, houses and preserves a plethora of exotic and native insects from all over the world.

The zoo was created in 2007 by Yong-Lak Park, professor of entomology at WVU, and Vicki Kondo, research assistant and zoo manager, and has served as a way to expose the community to native and exotic insects while also educating about their diversity, benefits and potential harms.

The zoo houses and displays about 26 different live species featuring arachnids like the200 scorpion and tarantulas. Several species of roaches, from the common cockroach to the Madagascar hissing cockroach, can be seen and heard as well.

The zoo’s outreach program has led them through the state to many schools, various on-campus events, local businesses and the state fair.

The exhibit is partially self-sustaining as many species of roaches constantly breed while also serving as food for the predatory insects. The herbivores of the exhibit, like the giant spiny stick insect from Papua New Guinea, munch on leaves while the roaches eat anything, including dog food.

All of these incredible creatures can be seen up close, and the more docile ones can even be taken out of their tanks or held if you’re brave. More dangerous species are also on display to be viewed from further away.

In the museum’s archives over 20,000 preserved specimens are organized, labeled, and have samples dating back to the 1800s.

The museum’s facilities include two collection rooms and museum-style housing with a specially designed vestibule and display room to prevent the escape of any insects. The zoo is also kept at a steady temperature with varying humidity in each tank based on the species it houses.

Many of the live insects are used in classes and research projects conducted on campus. Through the Arthropod Museum and Insect Zoo’s operations are currently suspended due to COVID-19, they have resources and video series featuring some of their insects available online.

During this time, Park looks to the community for support.

"We need support," Park said. "Spreading the word is extremely important in helping shape the future."

In the future, they would like to resume the program’s operations and outreach. For anyone on campus, the museum and zoo are an amazing place to visit for a fun and enriching experience. The many species featured have come from all over the world, showcase the diversity in nature and help us to better understand the world around us.

Equine studies minor helps WVU students gallop into their futures

BY AUBREY BURKHARDT STAFF WRITER

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2021 DA Pets of the Year

January: Mav
Meet Maverick, AKA Mav, a German Shepard who will be one year old in late August. He loves to play ball and spend any time outside as long as he’s with family. His favorite toy is an old raggedy reindeer that he carries around the house! Maverick knows to sit, lay down and paw (as of now). Mav’s favorite treat—chicken bacon!

Photo submitted by Leigha Shreve

February: Clark
Meet Clark, a 4-month-old white Labrador who loves water. His father won the best “Retriever Labrador” award at the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show last year. He also loves to meet other dogs. Clark can sit, roll, shake and lay and his favorite treat is a Busy Bone.

Photo submitted by Henry Fisher.

March: Finn
Finn Maximus Modecki, a three-year-old Silver Labrador from Cheat Lake. His favorite activities include walks and runs throughout the neighborhood. He absolutely loves chasing tennis balls, squirrels and deer throughout the property. He can also tell time, he knows exactly when it is breakfast and dinner time is and can let you know without looking at a clock. In his spare time he likes to pretend he is a magician- his favorite trick is making stuffed animals disappear.

Photo submitted by Andy Modecki

July: Ripley
Meet Ripley! She's much more energetic than your average bulldog. Ripley loves going to dog parks and running with the big dogs, meeting new people, playing with soccer balls and of course a good nap. Ripley also loves riding longboards and skateboards! When she gets on, it’s impossible to get her to get off and go inside. Her favorite treats are cheese, beef sticks and McDonald’s chicken nuggets.

Photo submitted by Brionna Lehman

August: Jingles
Meet Jingles! Jingles is 12-years-old and has more beds and blankets than we can count, but she prefers to sleep on her mom’s Tempur-Pedic. She loves peanut butter, Hoggin’ Dogs ice cream and Cheerios. Every Halloween her dad buys them matching costumes, this year she is going to be a lion!

Photo submitted by Raeanne Beckner

September: Zeus
Meet Zeus! Zeus is their owner’s first pet, which they got from their Greek Mythology professor at Potomac State College. Zeus loves to sit in an armchair and get brushed and frequently tries to get in the toilet to play with the water. For tricks, Zeus can catch flies in mid-air by slapping his paws together, and his favorite treat is Feline Temptations cat treats.

Photo submitted by Ashley Harris

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April: Gemma
Meet Gemma, a Labradoodle whose favorite activity is going to work and playing with others. She also loves to swim and go on hikes with her family and friends. Gemma can sit, stay, lay down, pound and high five! Gemma’s favorite treat is a Bully Stick.

Photo submitted by Sarah Riddle

May: Yapita
Meet Yapita! Yapita is super independent and all about snacks. She enjoys biting wires on her free time - she’s definitely an enemy of wireless technology. Yapita understands Spanish and English commands, and her favorite treat is all the foods!

Photo submitted by Gary Laruta

June: Loki
Meet Loki! He’s a huge goofball, and loves to sing and walk around the house looking for crumbs to eat. Loki’s favorite trick is when you say “boop,” he bobs his head up and down, and his favorite treat is pistachios.

Photo submitted by Taylor Schwartz

October: Poppy
Meet Poppy! Poppy hates to cuddle, but loves to sit between your legs under blankets. Her favorite thing to do is chase squirrels, but she’s just a little too loud and they always hear her coming before she gets there. Poppy loves people. Poppy’s best friends are her brother Jack and cousin Precious. Her best trick is pretending she doesn’t hear you when you call her name. Poppy’s favorite treat is Temptations cat treats.

Photo submitted by Jacey Prowse.

November: King Tut
Meet King Tut! King Tut is a Beta Fish and a good little boy. He loves to swim in circles and eat bloodworms. For tricks, King Tut will puff up really big if you put a mirror in front of him.

Photo submitted by Marron Blazer.

December: Willow
Meet Willow! Willow is a year old Golden Retriever who loves to meet other doggies at the local dog park. She loves to play all day, unless it’s around 8 p.m. when she takes her daily nap. Her favorite toys are her ropes - she’s an undefeated champion of tug-o-war! Willow can also sit, lay down, shake and high-five, and her favorite treat is bacon strips.

Photo submitted by Beckie Boyd.
Meet Barley, WVU’s unofficial therapy rabbit

BY LARA BONATESTA  
CULTURE EDITOR

West Virginia University’s newest celebrity weighs just 11 pounds and measures 23 inches from nose to tail. Barley, a Flemish Giant rabbit, has been bringing joy to students on his walks around campus with his father, Alex Smith.

Smith, a senior double major in wildlife and fisheries and horticulture, said he fell in love with Barley “almost immediately” when they met at an animal shelter just over a year ago.

“I walked by his cage, and he came right up to the bars, stuck his nose out and wanted pet,” Smith said. “So it really was love at first sight. It was almost like he chose me.”

Smith and Barley frequently go on walks around campus, visiting Woodburn Circle, Towers and the Core Arboretum.

Smith is often asked how he is able to get a rabbit to tolerate being on a leash.

“Most of it just has to do with temperament. So if he’s comfortable being played with and touched, it’s more likely he’s willing to be put into a harness,” Smith said.

Barley loves to lay on the steps of Martin Hall, eat the grass and dried leaves, and hop around in the dirt.

Yet, Smith and Barley aren’t the only ones who enjoy these walks. Students often approach the pair for the opportunity to meet Barley.

“People often comment that Barley gives them that extra serotonin they need to get through the day or they’ve had an exam that was tough and they get to come and play with Barley and pet him and it helps them relax,” Smith said.

For some students, Barley is also a reminder of their own pets.

“A lot of people who have pets at home see Barley and tear up. They’re like, ‘Oh my god, it reminds me of my dog or my cat,’ or some of them have bunnies,” Smith said.

Smith recommends anyone who is interested in adopting a rabbit to look into local animal rehabilitators and shelters. While shelters typically have dogs and cats on display, many will also have rabbits in a backroom, he explained.

“There are a lot of really sweet bunnies that are looking for good homes and so if you have the resources to care and love for a rabbit forever, definitely adopting. I would say, is the way to go,” he said.

Smith also advised potential adopters not to expect every rabbit to be just like Barley.

“Rabbits have a personality that most people don’t realize,” Smith said, adding that not all rabbits like to be touched, held or taken on walks.

“If you work with and gain the trust of your bunny, it can be an incredibly rewarding relationship,” Smith’s touching relationship with Barley and the rabbit’s love of people has resonated with many students.

“He’s an unofficial therapy animal for the people that come and play with him,” Smith said.

Smith even joked that WVU President E. Gordon Gee should give Barley an “honorary doctorate,” for his hard work.

To keep up with Smith and Barley you can follow Smith on Instagram or TikTok @plant bastard.
Students train service dogs for veterans through Hearts of Gold

BY SABRINA SIEGAN
STAFF WRITER

Hearts of Gold is an organization that has helped veterans with PTSD gain service dogs, and is also aiding in helping students get training related to service dogs. Lindsay Livengood, a visiting professor who has extensive educational as well as pet training experience, has stated that Hearts of Gold has two main goals.

“One is to educate students on service dogs and other assistance animals, along with how to train them. Two, to place service dogs with veterans with disabilities, mobility impairments and/or psychiatric disabilities. So, a lot of people for PTSD and and getting a dog from us,” said Livengood.

Livengood has been sought out, due to her background, by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health to work on Project ROVER researching the specific needs veterans with PTSD have that can be met with service dog help.

“We have several courses offered by WVU that students can take to learn how to train animals, and they learn about emotional support animals and therapy animals and the laws surrounding all different types of assistance animals,” explained Livengood. “We also have a prison program in FCI Morgantown where the inmates there get similar training to what WVU students do. And they also work with and train our dogs to be service dogs for veterans.”

For students looking to get involved with such an important group, iServe may not be the place to go.

“Yeah, we do have an iServe account,” said Livengood. “But we honestly don’t use it a lot, because our biggest need is for people to help with training the dogs. We don’t let people train our dogs unless they’re certified through us. So, really the only mechanism to get certified through us is to go through the WVU classes 276 and 277.”

These classes are AVS 276 Service Dog Training which is an online class that addresses the “content about service animals, what they are, what they do, how they’re trained, healthcare development, sensation and perceptions of dogs,” said Livengood.

AVS 277 Service Dog Laboratory then allows students who have finished AVS 276 work on learning how to train a service dog, hands on. These students are part of the College of Animal and Veterinary Sciences.

Livengood wants it to make clear that students do not need a dog or to house a dog to participate in ABS 276 or 277, “The online course you don’t do anything with dogs yet. Then for the hands-on labs we provide the dog for you, and it is housed elsewhere. So, students might have to transport them, like in their vehicles, to and from class. They don’t have to house them.”

Completing both classes certifies students to work with dogs at Hearts of Gold.

“Once certified you can volunteer with us, helping us take dogs out into public, getting them socialized, training. You can also be a teaching assistant or do like a 490 independent study with me, helping us with the online classes. It’s not too much, but you have to be certified first,” said Livengood.

Lindsay Livengood wants to make it clear that impact service dogs are having and we always try, before our classes, to impart on the students like the importance of the work they’re doing,” said Livengood. “We have testimonials from some of our veteran clients, that you know basically tell us we’ve saved their life, or the dog has saved their life.”

Q&A: WVU alum speaks on becoming a veterinarian

BY JORDAN HOWES
STAFF WRITER

The Daily Athenaeum spoke with Dr. Walker Roberts, current Director of Veterinary Medicine in Davenport, Florida and alum from West Virginia University’s pre-veterinary program.

Editor’s note: This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

Daily Athenaeum: When did you first decide you wanted to be a veterinarian? Why did you choose WVU’s pre-veterinary program?

Roberts: I’ve been practicing for almost four years. I graduated from the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine in 2018.

Daily Athenaeum: What made you choose WVU’s pre-veterinary program?

Roberts: So a little backstory is I actually spent my first two years at a separate college, Hannah College. I was in Hanover, Indiana, and what I quickly realized is that not every college is prepared to help people get into veterinary school. My family had lots of pets, and pets are a big part of my life.

Daily Athenaeum: How long have you been a practicing veterinarian? What would you say is the best part of your job?

Roberts: I mainly work in emergency medicine right now. So, pets who need not only urgent care for things like ear infections, but pets who are in life-threatening situations, come to me for it to stabilize and go into a bit of a more long-term care. I also sometimes do general practice medicine, which is more preventative care and management of chronic illnesses. And I am also the veterinarian for the birds at Disney, so if you ever go to Disney in Orlando, Florida, the birds, especially the macaws that fly around the tree of life and that are in the show there. Those are the birds I help manage.

Daily Athenaeum: In what would you say is the best part of your job?

Roberts: I think the best part of my job is being able to help pets in the emergency side, which is being there for pets when they really need someone, and they need help now. Going back to my passion for birds, I think a lot of people don’t get to see anything like it in a situation where their pets need help, but they cannot find that help. I am not in a position where the people in our area don’t have to worry about that because I can see not only dogs and cats but goats and primate and birds who need immediate attention.

Daily Athenaeum: What would you say is the worst part of your job? What would you recommend to a student for that is currently in the pre-veterinary program at WVU?

Roberts: I have a couple of points of advice. One, if you are still unsure if you want to go into the veterinary field, my best advice would be to shadow at a veterinary clinic. That’s a really good way to see “Is this something I’m interested in?” For the pre-vet students, a lot of us are always studying, and we’ve got our nose in a book, but don’t forget to have a life outside of that. College is also a time for you to explore other things. Then, my final thing for them (pre-vet students) would be that my grades were not the best my first two years. In the last two years, kind of made a comeback, and I still got into vet school the first time, so don’t worry if your grades aren’t pristine the first couple of years. If you make that come back, you’re still set.

Daily Athenaeum: Do you have any advice for a student that is currently in the pre-veterinary program at WVU?

Roberts: I think a lot of that depends on an individual. I myself had a lot of advice that I was in college. Being someone who loves birds, I always recommend cockatiels. They’re great first birds, and they’re not too noisy, but that also coming from a bird person ‘cause birds are noisy in general. I think dogs and cats also fall very well in there. I do know a couple of college students who come to our clinic that have dogs and cats, and it’s a good way to get you to take a break from school work and make sure you have someone there to get you out of the house for a walk or someone there that can help you through hard times.

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