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NEWS & EVENTS

MU College of Veterinary Medicine Opens Large Animal Ambulatory Facility

The veterinary medicine service that is home on the range now has a new home, following the grand opening on Friday, April 21, of the University of Missouri Veterinary Health Center's Large Animal Ambulatory facility just south of Clydesdale Hall.

The building provides space for offices and a classroom — with room to grow — on the upper level. The lower level offers garage bays for the ambulatory vehicles: fully stocked trucks that go out to farms to diagnose and treat the medical and surgical needs of animals within approximately a 40-mile radius of the university.



The Columbia Chamber of Commerce Ambassadors helped with the ribbon cutting to celebrate the opening of the new Veterinary Health Center Ambulatory facility. Representing the VHC were Chairman of Veterinary Medicine and Surgery John Dodam (second from left), Facility Supervisor Jason Brandow (third from left), Professor of Food Animal Medicine and Surgery John Middleton (center), and VHC Hospital Director David Wilson.

"When you grow, you eventually run out of space," said John Middleton, DVM, PhD, a professor of food animal medicine and surgery. "So one of the initiatives here was to provide more teaching and office space in addition to the garage."

Middleton said he has seen class sizes increase from approximately 65 to about 120 students per incoming first-year class during the 16 years he has worked at the College of Veterinary Medicine. He recalled that when he arrived on campus, the Veterinary Health Center had one ambulatory vehicle; now it has five.

"While we were working on this facility we recognized that, 'If we're going to have a 5,000-square-foot footprint, given the size of our campus and the limited space we have, and also the need for space to expand what we do in Clydesdale Hall, thinking vertically, if you will, was a good option,'" Middleton said.

"Our goal was to put this in close proximity to the large animal hospitals, and by so doing, we could put faculty offices in it," Middleton continued. "Obviously, you could build a facility like this at Middlebush Farm, but then it's disconnected from what we do here. Many of our faculty not only serve as the ambulatory clinicians, but also work in the hospital. We needed to be in close proximity. We're very happy to have this additional space."

MU's Campus Facilities office performed the design and architecture work for the new building. The project cost to date is about \$2.5 million, all of which came from funds allocated by the Missouri Senate and House Agriculture Committee to expand MU's large animal veterinary medicine program.

"In 2013, we testified in front of the legislature and made some requests to expand our food animal and large animal program. This building was part of that request," Middleton recalled. "We're now in the fourth year of that funding and we strategically saved some of that money each year to pay for this building. We also used that money to do other strategic initiatives for the large animal program, which include travel grants for our students to get off-campus experiences in rural large animal practice, and we've also hired a swine extension veterinarian, something that we had not had for several years, who is now serving the state with regard to swine. So, the legislative money is very important to us, and we're very thankful that the legislators brought that funding to the forefront."

In recent years, the veterinary profession has followed population trends by moving to more urban areas and treating companion animals, such as dogs and cats. There is a shortage of veterinarians in rural areas.

"One of our initiatives as a college is to try to increase programs that will hopefully train people who are interested in practicing in rural areas, and our ambulatory program is an important component of that," Middleton said.

"This allows us to get on the farm and provide services rather than the animals coming to us, although we do that, too," Middleton stated. "We see about 1,400 food animal cases a year in the hospital. Our ambulatory service, between equine and food animal, sees about 12,000 animals a year. The ambulatory service allows us to get out in the field and do things without clients having to put animals in a trailer and bring them in. We deal with some sizeable operations. If you have 100 head of cattle that need to be vaccinated, it makes more sense to go out in the field and do that."

"Probably the important point for our veterinary students is if we only teach them in the confines of the hospital, with specialized restraint facilities and other specialized equipment, they never really get the full practical experience of what it takes to work in a rural practice," Middleton continued. "We need to provide them with experiences that are realistic and in the context of what they are going to do when they practice. The ambulatory practice is very much a hands-on approach. There's a benefit to our students in seeing veterinary practice in a different context than in the hospital. Most clinical situations in rural areas are not going to look like our hospital."

"And, there's a benefit to local farmers," Middleton added. "Most of our veterinarians have advanced training; they are specialists. They can bring a different degree of specialization and help interpret complex problems that would sometimes be difficult in general practice."

The range of on-site services performed by the ambulatory staff include preventive care, vaccinations, wireless digital radiography, pregnancy diagnosis, ultrasound, dentistry, lameness examinations, castration, herd health disease testing, and more. Work is performed by appointment and a 24-hour emergency service is available.

The faculty veterinarians and interns who staff the large animal ambulatory service have made routine and emergency "farm calls" for horses and other farm animals for more than 10 years. While they are treating animals, the staff are also training the next generation of veterinarians.

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