

On Call with Dr. Downey

BY ALLISON NICOLE SCHULTZ

On Call With... is a new series in The Horse's Mouth which candidly features Boulder County veterinarians. This series will focus on the featured veterinarians' locality, their vet-life history in the Boulder County area, their favorite challenges in the field, their concerns about horse's and horse care in our area, their personal involvement in horses, and of course, why they chose to become a large animal veterinarian. In the first installment of the series, we focus on Dr. Christy Downey. Watch for your veterinarian to be featured as the series progresses.

For over four and a half years Dr. Christy Downey has been on call treating the equine residents of Boulder County. Dr. Downey's affinity for horses began as she was growing up in Wyoming. "We always had horses or had the chance to be around them," she remembers. Her father was ranch hand and her grandfather had a dairy in South Dakota. Between ranch horses and cart horses, the horse became a part of her landscape at a young age. Today, Dr. Downey has two horses at her home in Larimer County, and is often joined on her daily rounds around the county with her dog Riggs, an Australian Shepard/Blue Heeler mix.

As a young girl Christy Downey wanted to be involved in the veterinary field. In school, she liked the sciences and the ways in which they challenged her. Later while in college at the University of Wyoming, she thought seriously about being a veterinary technician, but during one fateful meeting with her advisor new opportunities opened for her. "When told him I wanted to be a vet tech, Dr. Atherton asked: 'Why do you want to be a vet tech? Why not be a vet?' At the time, I hadn't thought of that before." Shortly thereafter, Downey took pre-vet courses and began to apply to vet schools. "If he had never said that, I wouldn't be doing what I am today," reflected Downey.

Since she had been around horses in her youth and had groomed at race tracks later on, Downey became a large animal vet because horses were at her comfort level. "And, I don't like to be bitten by dogs and cats," she added with a smile. "I admire horses for their versatility and their ability to read their riders and respond in all the circumstances posed by all the disciplines. The horse's ability to read us is so amazing to me."

Dr. Downey graduated from Colorado State University in the spring of 2001 and has been working with Dr. Mark Fitch since the fall of 2001. During the summer after graduation, Dr. Downey moved to New Mexico to work at the Ruidoso race track. While working with a fellow veterinarian for the season at Ruidoso, she decided that being a track vet was not what she wanted to do. "There was too much moving around and not enough settling down," she says as she recalls the race track life. "You couldn't do fix-up projects and plant a garden. There was always another track to move to. Being a track vet wasn't what I had in mind when I thought about being a vet." At the end of the summers racing season, Dr. Downey moved to Boulder to join the practice of Dr. Fitch and nestle into the community.

Dr. Downey still enjoys the challenges of her work and admits that she has some frustrations with the veterinary business. She feels that some of equine health issues she sees could easily be avoided by better management. "What's frustrating for me in this business is dealing with non-selective breeding practices, or breeding with no regard to the end result." In non-selective breeding there is not only no concern for temperament and conformation of the offspring, but it also has greater potential to lead to structural complications and lameness issues. Another issue that worries Dr. Downey is insufficient pasture management practices. Overcrowding of horses within pastures not only ruins grasses and increases the infestation for invasive species by overgrazing, but from the perspective of a veterinarian, an overcrowded pasture with insufficient grazing opportunities and space lends itself to more instances of wounds and colic. Yet, despite these frustrations, Dr. Downey feels that as a whole Boulder County horse owners are very conscientious about their horse's care, and that Boulder County is an incredibly horse-friendly area. "For an increasingly urban environment," Downey states, "It's pleasant to see Boulder County's horse-friendliness in terms of the way that trails for horses are maintained within the city and are not just relegated to the mountainous areas."