



WCVM graduate's career is **RIGHT ON TRACK**

Dr. Kathy Anderson always knew she would spend her life working with horses — she just wasn't sure at first what sort of work that might turn out to be. By the time she focused on veterinary medicine and became a mature student at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVM) in 1982, she already had a wealth of experience behind her as a rider, three-day event competitor, instructor and barn manager.

Those experiences began more than 40 years ago in Anderson's hometown of Merritt, B.C. Although she lived right in the middle of cowboy country, Anderson grew up riding English because her mother happened to buy her an English saddle for \$5 in a Vancouver pawn shop.

One of Anderson's long-time friends is Nick Holmes-Smith, a well-known Canadian event rider and national team member. Through her friendship with Smith, Anderson attended the 1978 and 1982 FEI (Fédération Equestre Internationale) World Championships in eventing as a groom for the Canadian team. She met Dr. Martin Simensen, veterinarian for the U.S. team, at the 1982 competition in Luhmühlen, Germany — and that proved to be a fateful encounter.

"Dr. Simensen gave me encouragement and advice, and he urged me to keep in touch," says Anderson. "So when I graduated from WCVM in 1986, I called him and he offered me a job."

How does a horse-mad girl from the B.C. interior end up as the veterinarian attending Barbaro — the three-year-old winner of the 132nd Kentucky Derby and the racehorse whose breakdown during the Preakness Stakes on May 20 made headlines around the world this spring? For this hard working and dedicated graduate of the Western College of Veterinary Medicine, the journey was neither as long nor as improbable as you might think.

Anderson was soon on her way to South Hamilton, Mass., where she became an associate in Simensen's large and very busy equine practice. Most of the clinic's patients were racehorses from the local track — Suffolk Downs — and Anderson soon discovered that her WCVM training had prepared her well.

"I can't say enough about the high level of education and the tremendous amount of practical experience I received at WCVM," she says. "We worked on all sorts of horses, hundreds of them, and we did everything. It was absolutely invaluable. I've discovered down here that students from other veterinary colleges often don't get to do that sort of hands-on work while they're in school, so I feel very fortunate."

Anderson's steep learning curve continued in Massachusetts. "At a less than top level track like Suffolk Downs, you treat lots of lame horses. The trainers are good horsemen who work hard to keep their animals sound and running, and you learn a

lot. Again, I was getting loads of hands-on, practical experience."

When Suffolk Downs temporarily closed in 1990, Anderson moved on. In 1993, she opened her clinic at Fair Hill Training Center in Elkton, Md., where she now works closely with high-profile trainers like Michael Matz and others. Fair Hill is home to 500 racehorses — flat runners and steeplechasers — and Barbaro is only one among the facility's many stars.

A typical day for Anderson begins at 5:30 a.m. She attends the Fair Hill horses in the morning and does farm calls in the afternoon — often doing veterinary checks on yearlings headed for the big racehorse sales at Keeneland and Saratoga. She enjoys this part of her work very much — especially when some of these youngsters return to Fair Hill to go into training as promising two-year-olds.

Anderson sees her most prominent patient, Barbaro, almost every day. The New Bolton Center at the University of Pennsylvania — where Barbaro has been a patient since his catastrophic breakdown during the Preakness Stakes on May 20 — is only a half-hour's drive away from Fair Hill.

"He's out walking. The next big challenge will come when the cast comes off the broken leg and gets replaced by bandages and splints. Barbaro has a great attitude and a wonderful appetite. He can't work, so people are his targets now," says Anderson. "The accident was tragic, but it did show the world the compassionate hearts of people in the racing industry."

What advice does Anderson give to WCVM students who are thinking of going into equine practice? "The opportunities are unlimited. Find out what you want to do by trying it all: general, surgical, reproduction work. Get a feel for the hours and the pay. And don't be afraid to approach people — that's how I got my start. Networking and interacting are very important. WCVM may seem a bit isolated, but that doesn't matter much these days because of the Internet. Be prepared to work very hard, but you'll find the results are worth it." **H**

ABOVE: Trainer Michael Matz and Dr. Kathy Anderson stand beside Barbaro the day before his breakdown at the Preakness Stakes on May 20.