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## House Calls for Large Animals

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*University of Pennsylvania*



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## HOUSE CALLS FOR LARGE ANIMALS

**H**ouse calls may be a rarity in the human medical profession, but in veterinary medicine they are often the practical expedient. Far from the romanticized vision of the country vet, the field service veterinarians at New Bolton Center make their daily rounds in self-contained mobile units, not unlike the paramedic units that respond to human emergencies.

Heading up the mobile Field Service Unit at New Bolton is Dr. Richard Bartholomew, assisted by Dr. John Fetrow, Dr. Elaine Hammel, Dr. Chris Uhlinger and residents, Dr. Susan Crane and Dr. Christine Ross. Dividing calls between them and according to each one's area of expertise, the veterinary team responds to the needs of ailing animals 24 hours a day. Most of their patients are area farm animals with an emphasis on horses and cattle.

"The Field Service Unit was developed at New Bolton in 1952 and until the mid-1970s, it was an extension of the large animal hospital. Under the direction of Dr. William Boucher, an ambulatory unit was formed, which operated autonomously from the hospital," explained Dr. Bartholomew. "It was a relatively small operation, then run by Dr. Boucher with the help of two interns. We've grown tremendously in the years since I've been here."

Operating out of a small white house on campus, the field service office is a busy place with ringing phones and frequent traffic in and out of the door. Secretary Betty Branham helps to keep the staff on schedule.

Two of the biggest routine health problems, according to Dr. Bartholomew, are vaccinations and worming procedures.

"We almost always treat the animals on site. Occasionally, we will refer a case to the hospital for surgery that can't be performed in the field," said Dr. Bartholomew. "We each

have regular clients who call us about a health problem and we go out to the farm or cooperative to diagnose and treat the illness.

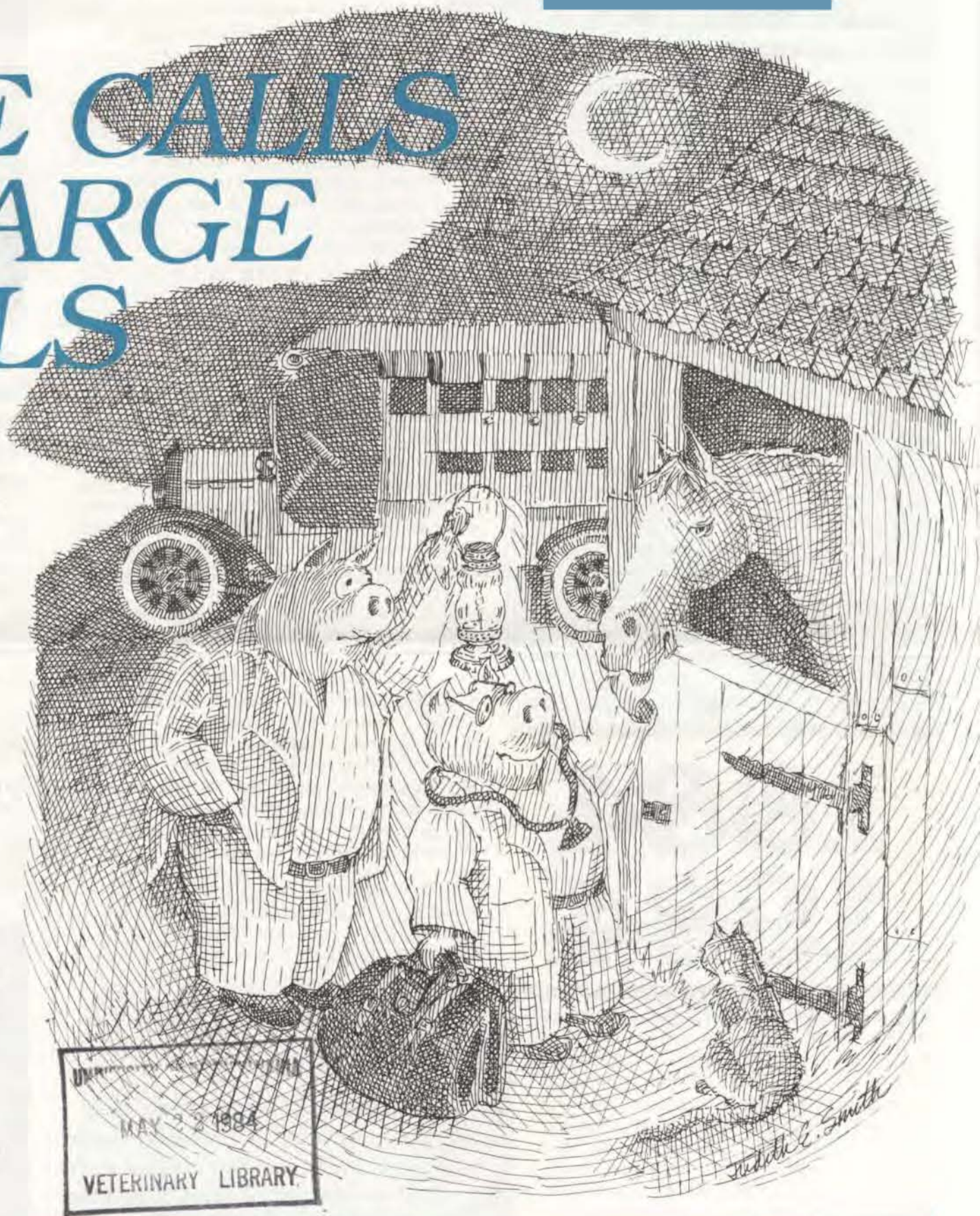
"While we're at the site, we try to educate the client as much as possible in the treatment of his animals, since it is impossible for us to be there to provide 24-hour care. It also saves the client additional veterinary bills.

"Acutely ill animals require emergency treatment. For instance, what can be a simple belly ache in a human, can be life-threatening colic in a horse. A calcium deficiency sometimes related to difficult calving can cause a

condition called milk fever, which can be fatal for cows. Mastitis is also a serious condition in cows and other milk-producing animals. Diarrhea threatens the lives of many newhorns," he continued.

"We can do almost anything in the field that is done in the hospital, but we lack round-the-clock intensive care. We have to rely on the client. On the bigger cattle farms there are usually qualified people to give medications and administer treatments. The individual farmer is sometimes a bit squeamish about treating his own animals."

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## THE FIELD SERVICE UNIT AT NEW BOLTON CENTER

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While viral and bacterial infections in all farm animals are frequently diagnosed and treated by the field service veterinarians, other conditions warranting treatment range from lameness and other foot problems to dermatological conditions and teeth care in horses, primarily. Dr. Uhlinger and Dr. Hammel specialize in equine medicine. Uhlinger is the dentist on the team and Dr. Hammel has a strong interest in sports medicine for horses.

Dr. Fetrow specializes in herd health and food production animals, as well as the economic consequences of disease. To facilitate the function of the Field Service Unit, he has computerized the unit's record-keeping function, thus making it easier to keep track of patient histories and other health data. Dr. Fetrow was also responsible for streamlining many other business functions at the Center.

The routine health care of an intensive swine raising facility comprising 400 sows located on the New Bolton Center campus is another responsibility of the Field Service Unit.

Teaching is an important function of the Unit. Fourth-year veterinary students accompany the field service staff on their rounds of local farms and, under the observation of the senior veterinarians, assist in the diagnosis and treatment of animal health problems.

"Our basic function is to serve the community and to teach students," said Dr. Bartholomew. "The fourth-year students spend two weeks with us and get practical hands-on experience with large animals. The training is part of a senior rotation program."

Client education is also an important function of the Unit. Programs focusing on subjects like neonatal diarrhea have received good response. According to Dr. Bartholomew, plans are underway for annual client education programs on a variety of animal health topics.

Accessibility to patients far and wide is made possible through the Unit's mobility. Four of the five field service vehicles are fully-equipped emergency mobile units. The fifth is a suburban van. The mobile units carry oxygen, emergency drugs, portable X-ray equipment, and are outfitted with two-way radio systems. The veterinarians also wear beepers, so they do not miss any calls from the office.

**"We almost always treat the animals on site. Occasionally we will refer a case to the hospital for surgery that can't be performed in the field."**

Dr. Bartholomew, who hails from Vermont, specializes in bovine reproduction and herd health. He came to New Bolton in 1968 from Cornell University to help develop, and subsequently direct, the operations of the present Field Service Unit. Graduating from Cornell in 1962, Dr. Bartholomew stayed on to work with the university's ambulatory clinic, doing postgraduate study in cattle reproduction.

Also a member of the teaching staff at New Bolton, he has received the Lindback Award from the University of Pennsylvania for distin-



**The mobile units carry oxygen, emergency drugs, portable X-ray equipment, and are outfitted with two-way radio systems.**

guished teaching. While he divides his time between the Unit responsibilities and lecture commitments, Dr. Bartholomew noted with a smile that, as head of the Unit, he doesn't pull as much night duty.

Off-duty hours are spent with his family, including wife Patricia and a son, Ricky, and a daughter, Jane, at their Chatham, Chester County home. Dr. Bartholomew is also active in Boy Scouts of America and enjoys collecting and refinishing antiques as a hobby.

The field service veterinarians are a dedicated bunch. While theirs is a serious business of long, hard days, a sense of humor prevails. Proud of his organization, Dr. Bartholomew agrees that teamwork is the key to the Field Service Unit's success. *Carol A. Watson*

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