

For Aurora veterinarian, it's knowing how to work with humans

By BRANDON JOHANSSON

The Aurora Sentinel

Published: Thursday, October 15, 2009 2:00 PM MDT

AURORA |

When he opened up shop 30 years ago in the Mission Viejo neighborhood, the area east of his veterinary clinic was mostly farmland.

That meant Dr. Bruce Louderback's clinic didn't just deal with cats and dogs — it regularly dealt with livestock, too.

"I've actually had a llama in exam room one, getting a heath certificate," Louderback said with a chuckle.

The neighborhood around Louderback's clinic has changed substantially since he moved there in 1976, but one constant has been the Mission Viejo Veterinary Hospital's presence at East Hampden Avenue and South Chambers Road.

"Aurora has been unbelievably good to me," he said.

Last month, Louderback was named Colorado Veterinarian of the Year by the Colorado Veterinary Medical Association.

The organization, which represents more than 1,600 people in the state's veterinary industry, said Louderback "has distinguished himself as a competent and highly ethical practitioner for over 30 years."

Bob Rhode, executive director of the Dumb Friends League and a client of Louderback's for almost 30 years, said Louderback has always been up front with his clients.

"He is honest, direct, and very no-nonsense," he said in a statement from CVMA.

Rhode said he first met Louderback 30 years ago when he was new in the area and Rhode's dog cut his paw. He said he called the Mission Viejo clinic and met Louderback there.

"He looked at the paw and said 'I don't have anyone to assist me. You know animals, right? Come and assist me,'" Rhode said. "And he has been my veterinarian—and now my son's—ever since. He never pulls any punches, and he is always fair and honest."

Louderback said he loves animals, but that isn't why he loves being a vet.

"I've always liked animals but that's a weak answer. I get along with people well, and I like people. And as much as we don't like to admit it, taking care of animals is a people business," he said.

While dealing with people is the best part of the job, it also presents the biggest challenge, Louderback said.

Even in 30 years as a vet, he said it is still a challenge everytime he has to break bad news to a pet owner, he said.

"Sending bad news is difficult and it never gets easier, I can assure you that," he said. "People's pets are like their kids. You just have to be really empathetic to what's going on."

Louderback said that while breaking bad news to pet owners is always a challenge, he takes pride in making the often difficult experience as comfortable as it can be for his clients.

And those efforts have meant a lot of return customers, people who keep coming to Mission Viejo even long after they move away from the area.

"A lot of zip codes come to this clinic," he said.

In his 30 years, Louderback said he has seen a lot of change in the veterinary industry — particular in terms of the growth of corporate-owned clinic chains and increased specialization in the field.

With the increased specialization, Louderback said that has meant learning when to refer a customer to a specialist and when to handle their needs in-house.

"Its very important that you know what you don't know and give the people an opportunity if they need specialized service," he said.

He has also seen the veterinarian business change from one dominated by males to one where the vast majority of people who enter the field are females.

When he graduated from the University of Illinois School of Veterinary Medicine in 1970, 63 of the 70 people in his graduating class were male, he said. Now, many schools graduate classes that are 90- to 95-percent female.

"Its not a small shift, its a major shift," he said.

Louderback said he thinks most of the change is the result of economic issues.

"Vets are not extremely wealthy, they just make a good living," he said. "Some of the men who look at themselves as bread winners are going into more lucrative fields."