

## *Meet Our Veterinary Technician, Rachel Wigren*



*Rachel started working at Animal Care Clinic in 1997. She is currently the longest employed member of the ACC staff and has been with Dr. Brent and Dr. Debbie since the beginning. She excels at critical care nursing, keeping the surgery schedule running efficiently, and anything to do with bloodwork and IV catheter placement. She also has a great sense of humor.*

**Rachel, like many others on staff, you came to a career in veterinary medicine from quite a different career path. What brought you to this line of work?**

I'm not always sure how I got here myself! I have my Bachelor's Degree in elementary education, but at the time I was looking for teaching positions there weren't many available. I needed a job and seeing that I was a lifelong animal lover and had always had all sorts of pets, when I saw the ad for a veterinary assistant I thought it would be a great job to bridge the gap until I went back to teaching. Apparently the bridge is a long one because I'm still here! I like to think, however, that I still use the skills I learned as a teacher in working with animals - and equally importantly, in my other job as a mom!

**You were already working at "Animal Clinic Associates" when Dr. Brent and Dr. Debbie bought the practice in 1997. What about Animal Care Clinic has kept you here all of these years - especially when you commute from Ridgefield, WA?**

If nothing else I must admit I'm a creature of habit - so there is that personality trait that keeps me coming. But more importantly, it's the relationships I've made with my co-workers and the clients that make the drive worth it! I'm also lucky to be able to work slightly "off hours" to help avoid the worst traffic. I value my long term status at ACC in terms of the changes I've seen, the lessons I've learned, and hopefully the lives I've impacted. I also feel that Drs. Brent and Debbie value the years that I've put in and that shows in the relationship we've built and in the things they do to recognize longevity from all of their staff members.

**You've seen many changes to the clinic over the years. In your opinion what are some of the most important changes you have witnessed?**

Oh my goodness, where to start? There are so many. But I think that the changes in veterinary medicine in general are the most amazing overall - especially when you stop to think where the industry was as a whole 14 years ago. It doesn't seem like a long time really, but the changes are impressive. Great strides have been made in the basics like parasite control, dental health, diet and pain management. And then there are new treatment avenues such as laser therapy, laparoscopy and digital radiology (all of which are available at ACC by the way) that give the veterinary team many

more tools to work with. Working in such a progressive practice has allowed me the opportunity to experience these things and get a hands on feel for how they work and how they can be utilized to improve and enrich the lives of our patients and clients. Drs. Brent & Debbie also value and encourage continuing education for the entire staff so I've been fortunate to attend many seminars and training sessions over the past years that serve to further my education as well as fuel my desire to always strive to learn more and give more to the animals we see.

**You also worked at an emergency clinic in WA for a time. Did you bring new skills from that experience back to Animal Care Clinic?**

I think those two years were extremely valuable. It was after the birth of my son, Tanner, that I worked at the emergency clinic. It was much closer to home and open overnight so I could work while my son was home with my husband. When I first saw the ad for an emergency clinic technician I was hesitant to respond. I had only been a technician for four years at that time and I wasn't sure I had the necessary skills. I think it's a testament to ACC and the opportunities given to me by Drs. Brent & Debbie that enabled me to not only get the job but become a valued member of the emergency clinic team. Still to this day, they always let me know that I could have a job if ever I needed one!

Emergency medicine is fast paced and unpredictable. I loved having the opportunity to hone my technical skills and really see immediate results from the work I did. The immediacy of needing to evaluate a patient and make decisions that could literally mean life or death was amazing, but I admit that I did miss the continuity of care. Many times I wondered whatever happened to the patient that I nursed so carefully all night?

**You, your husband, Tim, and your son, Tanner, own Command Performance, a horse training facility in Ridgefield. With your affinity for and your talent with horses, why did you choose side work in the small animal veterinary field?**

Horses are definitely a major part of my life. In fact, I met my husband in 1988, when he was the trainer at a facility where I boarded my horse. After a ten year friendship we were even married in our barn on horseback! We live on site at our training facility and at any one time have 25-35 horses in our care so it's a 24/7 job. Really it's more of a lifestyle. The days that I'm not at the clinic I'm in the barn, or doing the administrative duties for our training business, or trying to get a ride on my own horse! In addition, my "hobby" is also my horses - I show them as an amateur at the local, regional and national level. I think if I worked as an equine technician as well, I'd face the very real possibility of burn out. Animal medicine is an all encompassing profession that demands 100% of your mind and body. I appreciate the chance to do something a little different by working with smaller animals while also having the opportunity to learn things that will impact my horsey life as well. And having horse loving co-workers doesn't hurt either!

**For those of us who are equine-ignorant, how is working with horses different from working with dogs and cats?**

With horses it's all about mentally being one step ahead! There is no way to out-muscle a horse, whether you're on the ground or in the saddle, so you have to work on establishing boundaries and expectations. Here, repetition is your friend! Like smaller animals, however, the bond of trust that you form with your horse will be key to working together. A horse that trusts it's handler will do amazing things! The equine brain is tiny in relation to the size of the body so you have to be willing to take tiny steps and be consistent. There's a great saying that my husband uses all the time - "every time you touch, you teach". That, to me, epitomizes working with horses.

**You have pets at home - quite a few - can you give us a rundown (including horses)?**

Oh boy! Currently we have 6 horses (4 show horses, 1 retired brood mare and 1 full time lesson horse) though we care for many more, 2 dogs (1 doberman & 1 English springer spaniel), 7 cats (all were strays, 3 of whom came through ACC), & 8 chickens. Growing up, however, I also had rabbits, freshwater fish, goats and birds (from parakeets to many types of parrots).

**What do you think is the hardest part of your job?**

You know this is a tough one. I think the answer many people think of, and the one I probably would have given early on in my career, would be euthanasia and dealing with the death of a pet. Over the years I've come to view euthanasia a bit differently. While it's never easy to say good-bye to a loved one, there are times when the ability to end the suffering of a pet is actually a blessing, and one I take very seriously. It is a very personal decision and one that I don't think is ever taken lightly. That being said, there is also the realization that this is a personal decision made by this owner for their pet and the ability to put my opinions and/or beliefs aside is important in being able to provide what this individual client and their pet need and want. That is not to say we are never asked for our opinion or asked the always difficult question, "what would you do if this were your pet?". But the primary consideration for me is always what is best for this pet and owner.

So, I'd say the toughest part of my job is the patients that we can't help. Whether it be financial constraints, different beliefs, or a medical condition that is not curable, the feeling of not being able to help a pet is a difficult one. As I've said, veterinary medicine is very involved and we truly put 100% of ourselves out there both physically and emotionally, so the inability to "fix" what's wrong can really take a toll. Luckily, our team at ACC is really close, so we are able to look to each other for support - as can our clients, we hope!

**And lastly, what is your all time favorite part of your job?**

This is another one of those impossible-to-pick-one-thing questions! It's easy to think of the new puppies and kittens who are so cute and who have a whole life of memories to create with their families - or the animals who are sick or injured that I'm able to help successfully treat and care for. But I must say in all honesty that it's simply the constant challenge of being a veterinary technician that I truly love. Nothing is ever routine because no two patients or clients are alike. Those are also the things that make my job exhausting, but oh-so-rewarding, and I guess that is part of what keeps me at ACC!