Llama Enthusiast Supports Unique Clinical Opportunities

When Joy Pedroni of Black Cat Llamas needs veterinary assistance with her small herd of 15, she knows exactly who to call – Dr. Julie Dechant, a specialist in the veterinary hospital’s Large Animal Clinic. Pedroni is a long-time client and has been a great resource for students. “I can’t say enough about the hospital,” Pedroni said. “The compassion everyone shows is paramount for me. They always make me and my animals feel like we’re the most important ones there.”

On several occasions, Pedroni has been the driving force behind llama and alpaca rescues, and brought dozens of camels to the hospital. The rescued animals generally come from defunct sanctuaries, owner abandonments and hoarding situations. Brought to the hospital for wellness examinations, sterilizations, hoof trimmings and shearings, the camelids Pedroni rescues provide great learning opportunities for students who are eager to work on animals they normally would not see on their hospital rounds.

Pedroni sometimes utilizes her llamas as pack animals on camping and hiking trips, and says that this is an increasingly popular activity among camelid enthusiasts. Llamas participate in events and shows, similar to horses and dogs, and Pedroni uses hers as goodwill ambassadors in parades and agriculture events for children. Llamas are even brought to hospitals and retirement communities as therapy animals. As these activities increase and ownership becomes more commonplace, the hospital’s camelid medicine services provide a much-needed resource for the community.

Every January, the school hosts the Camelid Symposium, a hugely popular two-day event that attracts hundreds of owners from across the western United States. Pedroni serves on the planning committee for the symposium, always enthusiastic about promoting camelid health.