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Wisconsin, Ontario veterinary students win National DHIA scholarships

FITCHBURG, Wis. (February 17, 2017) – The National Dairy Herd Information Association (DHIA) Scholarship Committee selected two college of veterinary medicine students as recipients of \$1,500 scholarships. Selection committee members evaluated applicants on overall interest as a veterinarian planning to work in dairy, involvement in dairy medicine and extra-curricular activities, and interest in using dairy software and dairy records to aid in dairy management and in improving animal health. To be eligible for a National DHIA veterinary student scholarship, applicants must be third- or fourth-year college of veterinary medicine students, enrolled at a college that is accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association Council on Education.

This year's National DHIA veterinary student scholarship winners are Brandon Scharping, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis.; and Kandice Runyon, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ont., Canada. Scharping gained valuable farm experience on his grandpa's dairy farm and showing and judging dairy cattle. As a University of Wisconsin-River Falls undergraduate, he worked at the university's dairy farm. While in veterinary school, Scharping worked as a bovine artificial insemination (AI) technician. He shared his skills as an AI technician on a Christian Veterinary Mission trip to Ecuador. During that trip, he taught local veterinarians and government officials about cattle AI and conducted AI training on area farms.

Additionally, Scharping worked at the Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory in the virology department. His responsibilities included testing bull semen for certain viruses to qualify for international export and testing ear notches and whole blood for bovine viral diarrhea. Also, Scharping performed a research project that involved taking whole blood and nasopharyngeal swab samples to evaluate for respiratory viral pathogen detection via polymerase chain reaction after dairy calves were vaccinated with several different modified live bovine respiratory vaccines. He presented the results at the 2016 American Association of Bovine Practitioners Annual Conference.

Scharping gained valuable DHIA knowledge through his dairy core skills course. Students looked at DHIA herd summaries, fresh cow summaries and udder health management summaries, and used the data to find dairy operations' weak points before making farm consulting visits. This course teaches students how to analyze and practice consulting to provide

farmers ways to improve milk production, reproduction, stillbirths, herd turnover rates, transition cow health, somatic cell count and mastitis.

After graduation, Scharping will work for the Lena Veterinary Clinic in Lena, Ill. Covering southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois, he plans to perform advanced reproductive techniques such as embryo transfer and ovum pickup for in vitro fertilization embryos. Working primarily with dairy cattle, he will also care for equine and cover companion animal emergency duties.

Eventually, Scharping would like to teach dairy production medicine or reproductive anatomy and physiology at the university level. Furthermore, he would like to continue serving on mission trips through his church or through Christian Veterinary Mission.

Runyon grew up in rural Ontario, surrounded by small, family farms. She wasn't raised on a farm, but she showed dairy cattle for 10 years and helped run a successful, fourth-generation dairy farm. Runyon spent eight weeks in the Waikato Region of New Zealand for calving season. Last spring, she spent four weeks with New Mexico veterinarians. Caring for numerous dairy cows, she said she gained a "lifetime of learning" during that rotation. She palpated nearly 5,000 cows and heifers for pregnancy as low as 32 days after breeding, assisted with protocol development on both conventional and organic dairies, performed numerous surgeries and helped with calvings.

"The amount of time that veterinarians spend analyzing data really introduced me to a whole new side of veterinary medicine," Runyon stated. "This experience influenced my decision to pursue a career that focuses on consulting and data management with my clients.

Last June, Runyon spent four weeks at the University of Wisconsin School of Veterinary Medicine in the institution's dairy-intensive core skills rotation. This rotation focused on farm assessments using DHI, DairyComp and Transition Cow Index records, calf health investigation, partial budgeting skills and feed analysis. "I was extremely excited and impressed by the amount of knowledge you can obtain about a farm before even stepping foot on it," she stated.

Runyon completed an externship in Ontario, Canada, last summer. The full immersion experience included scheduling appointments, handling late-night emergency calls, performing ultrasounds, evaluating freestall design, analyzing data and communicating with clients.

In November, Runyon traveled to Israel to learn about heat abatement methods, data collection and animal monitoring. Based on her vast travel experiences, she discovered one recurring theme – the struggle to present consumers with scientifically based information from reputable sources. "I truly believe that veterinarians should take the lead in fulfilling this role," she commented.

After graduation, Runyon will work for Herd Health Management, Phoenix, as a dairy practitioner.

Money generated from the annual National DHIA Scholarship Auction primarily funds the organization's scholarship program. Investments and donations also help build the fund. To make a donation to the fund, contact Leslie Thoman at 608-848-6455 ext. 108 or lthoman@dhia.org.

National DHIA, a trade association for the dairy records industry, serves the best interests of its members and the dairy industry by maintaining the integrity of dairy records and advancing dairy information systems.

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