

- [Home](#)
- [About](#)
- [Admissions](#)
- [Academics](#)
- [Research](#)
- [Outreach](#)
- [Hospitals](#)
- [Diagnostic Center](#)
- [Giving](#)



## To stay in the know

### January 2014

- [ALUMNI ASSOCIATION NEWS](#)
- [COLLEGE NEWS](#)
- [ALUMNI NEWS](#)
- [DEVELOPMENT NEWS](#)
- [STUDENT NEWS](#)
- [EVENTS](#)
- [ARCHIVES](#)

## Student Voice

In this and future issues of eVETSconnect, we will be introducing current students to you. Please meet [Danique Wortel '16!](#)

[eVETS connect](#) > Nominate now for the 2014 Salmon Award

## Nominate now for the 2014 Salmon Award

## **Continue the Legacy**

You know your peers best. You know what they do day in and day out to serve their patients and clients. You know the passion they commit to furthering the profession of veterinary medicine. And, you know the loyalty that drives their service to your alma mater.

Help us honor our alumni by nominating a Cornell graduate for the Daniel Elmer Salmon Award for Distinguished Alumni Service. Named in honor of Cornell's first DVM graduate, who is remembered for his pioneering work in controlling contagious animal diseases in the early 20th century, the award was established by the Alumni Association in 1986 to recognize graduates who have distinguished themselves in service to the profession, their communities, or to the College.

Nominations are accepted throughout the year until May 1. The recipient of the award is notified by September 1 and is honored at the annual New York State Veterinary Conference.



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Now**

## **Additional news from the Alumni Association**

Visit our [website](#) for a listing of our board members and our meeting dates. Each fall, we welcome nominations to the board.

To reach the Office of Alumni Affairs, Development, and Communications, call 607.253.3745 or [email](#) – subject line “Alumni Association.”

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## Student Profile: Danique Wortel '16

POSTED ON NOVEMBER 11, 2013 BY COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE

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What's it like to be a Cornell vet student? Danique Wortel gives a glimpse.

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- [Home](#)
- [About](#)
- [Admissions](#)
- [Academics](#)
- [Research](#)
- [Outreach](#)
- [Hospitals](#)
- [Diagnostic Center](#)
- [Giving](#)



## To stay in the know

### January 2014

- [ALUMNI ASSOCIATION NEWS](#)
- [COLLEGE NEWS](#)
- [ALUMNI NEWS](#)
- [DEVELOPMENT NEWS](#)
- [STUDENT NEWS](#)
- [EVENTS](#)
- [ARCHIVES](#)

[eVETS connect](#) > [Nominate now for the 2014 Salmon Award](#) > Equine Medical Director

## Dr. Scott Palmer appointed Equine Medical Director

***Dr. Palmer will oversee health and safety of horses at NYS Tracks and serve as an Adjunct Professor at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine***

The New York State Gaming Commission and the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine today announced the appointment of Scott E. Palmer, VMD as the state's Equine Medical Director after conducting an international search.

Dr. Palmer, a renowned veterinarian from New Jersey with more than three decades of experience in providing medical care for horses, will oversee the health and safety of horses at all New York State



Thoroughbred and Standardbred racetracks. He was selected from an international pool of finalists by a blue-ribbon search committee of veterinarians and horse industry professionals.

Dr. Palmer will be responsible for all aspects of equine health, safety, and welfare at New York racetracks and will advise the Commission on equine medication policies as well as the safety and condition of racetrack facilities and surfaces. He will supervise all on-track regulatory veterinarians as well as the New York State Equine Drug Testing Program laboratory. He will oversee equine testing procedures, ensure compliance with regulatory veterinary protocols, investigate incidents and monitor the Commission's necropsy program.

As New York's Equine Medical Director, Dr. Palmer will also serve as an Adjunct Professor at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine, where he will be responsible for developing and coordinating continuing education programs for veterinarians and trainers related to medication and equine injuries. He will coordinate research on equine sports medicine topics and collaborate with faculty on epidemiological studies to analyze equine safety issues.

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo said, "Dr. Palmer brings a wealth of experience and expertise that will benefit the entire horse racing community. His skills and knowledge are crucial to the safety and well-being of New York's world-class race horses and I am proud to welcome him to the Gaming Commission.

Robert Williams, Acting Executive Director of the Gaming Commission, said, "We are honored to have Dr. Palmer on the team. His decades of work creating critical health and safety improvements in horse racing are well recognized and make him the ideal candidate to bring important equine safety measures to life at all New York State tracks. Dr. Palmer is an outstanding veterinarian and a consummate professional and we look forward to working with him."

Michael I. Kotlikoff, Austin O. Hooey Dean of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell's College of Veterinary Medicine, said, "I congratulate the Governor on his commitment to improving the health and safety, as well as the economic vitality, of New York racing. This appointment is an important step in a process that began with the Governor's mandate to reorganize the regulatory agency overseeing horse racing, restructure NYRA, and commission a task force to improve equine safety. The designation of a highly experienced veterinarian with broad authority to oversee all aspects of racing regulations, testing, and compliance, as well as research and education, will ensure the integrity of, and public confidence in, New York State's premier racing programs."

Dr. Palmer said, "I am honored to join the Commission and to help bolster New York's ongoing commitment to equine health and safety. Having a sole veterinary point of contact overseeing all New York race horses and having access to Cornell's array of resources is simply smart policy. I am eager to get to work, and I look forward to working with our partners to create as safe an environment as possible for our horses."

Since his graduation from the University Of Pennsylvania School Of Veterinary Medicine in 1976, Dr. Palmer has worked as a staff clinician at the New Jersey Equine Clinic, serving as the Hospital Director since 1997. He is a two-time recipient of the New Jersey Equine Practitioners Veterinarian of the Year award, as well as a recipient of the AAEP President's Award in 2009 and the AAEP Distinguished Service Award in 2010.

Dr. Palmer is board certified in equine practice by the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners. He has authored dozens of peer-reviewed publications and is a featured speaker at veterinary conferences world-wide. He is a member of several professional organizations and has held leadership positions in many, including the American Veterinary Medical Association, the American Association of Equine Practitioners, the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners, the New Jersey Veterinary Medical Association, and the New Jersey Association of Equine Practitioners.

Dr. Palmer chaired the New York Task Force on Racehorse Health and Safety, which was formed at the request of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo in 2012 in the wake of 21 equine fatalities during Aqueduct's 2011-12 Winter Meet. The New York State Equine Medical Director position was established last year as a key recommendation of that Task Force.

Dr. Palmer serves as a Board Member for the NTRA Safety and Integrity Alliance Advisory Board and the Thoroughbred Charities of America. He previously served on the ARCI Special Task Force on Medication and chaired the International Summit on Race Day Medication as well as the Ad-Hoc RMTCC Committee on Race Day Security and served two terms as member of the Grayson-Jockey Club Research Advisory Committee.

Jerry Bailey, a Hall of Fame jockey, television analyst for ESPN and NBC, and member of the New York Task Force on Racehorse Health and Safety, said, "Scott Palmer is an outstanding selection to lead New York's equine medical program. As he proved during his work on the Task Force, he has the knowledge and foresight to delve deep into complex issues surrounding equine health and come up with sound, effective solutions, as well as an unparalleled work ethic. I am very happy for Scott and congratulate him as he embarks on this latest endeavor."

Alan Foreman, chairman and chief executive officer of the Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association and a member of the New York Task Force on Racehorse Health and Safety, said, "I had the good fortune of seeing Scott's excellent work in person while on the Task Force on Racehorse Health and Safety. He's the ideal candidate to serve as Equine Medical Director. His knowledge of the horse will be an absolute asset for New York State's robust horse racing industry. I congratulate Scott on the position and applaud Governor Cuomo for appointing such a seasoned professional."

James L. Gagliano, president and chief operating officer of The Jockey Club, said, "The appointment of an Equine Medical Director clearly reinforces New York State's commitment to horse health and safety. Dr. Palmer is highly regarded throughout the Thoroughbred industry and we look forward to working with him, and with the New York State Gaming Commission, to further enhance the safety of our athletes."

Chris Kay, CEO and president of The New York Racing Association, Inc. (NYRA), said, "Scott brings outstanding credentials to this important new position, and he shares our steadfast commitment to equine safety. Our newly hired senior vice president of racing operations, Martin Panza, also brings a wealth of experience to his new role, and he and Scott will work very closely together on behalf of all thoroughbreds at Aqueduct Racetrack, Belmont Park and Saratoga Race Course."

Paul J. Estok, Executive Vice President and General Counsel for Harness Tracks of America, said, "The appointment of Dr. Scott Palmer as New York racing's first Equine Medical Director is good news for racing. Dr. Palmer's impeccable credentials as a practitioner combined with his work as an advocate for better drug testing, as a leader dealing with retired and "unwanted" racehorses, and his understanding of racing's varied stakeholder interests make him the ideal candidate to lead New York's effort to lead North America in health, safety, and integrity initiatives for the equine athlete."

Lawrence R. Bramlage, DVM, partner and equine orthopedic surgeon at Rood & Riddle Equine Hospital located in Lexington, Ky., said, "Dr. Palmer is a widely respected and talented veterinarian who has broad experience on the backside, as a surgeon, and as a member of numerous committees and task forces on racing. He will be a real champion for New York's racehorses. His record as a

racing advocate and in equine practice speaks for itself and I congratulate him on his new position, as well as New York State for bringing him on board.”

The Equine Medical Director Search Committee consisted of:

- Michael I. Kotlikoff, VMD, PhD. (chair) – Dean, Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine
- Robert Williams – Acting Executive Director, Gaming Commission
- Mary Scollay-Ward, DVM - Equine Medical Director, Kentucky Horse Racing Commission
- Lisa A. Fortier, DVM, PhD. – Associate Professor, Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine
- Thomas J. Divers, DVM - Steffen Professor of Veterinary Medicine, Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine
- Jerry Bilinski, DVM – Proprietor, Waldorf Farms
- Terry Finley – Founder and President, West Point Thoroughbreds
- Kenny McPeek – Trainer, McPeek Racing
- Bennett Liebman – Deputy Secretary for Gaming and Racing, NYS Executive Chamber
- Anthony Bonomo – NYRA Reorganization Board member
- C. Steven Duncker - NYRA Reorganization Board member

The New York Task Force on Racehorse Health and Safety’s full recommendations can be found [here](#).

#### About the New York State Gaming Commission

The New York State Gaming Commission regulates all aspects of gaming and gambling activity in the state, including horse racing and pari-mutuel wagering, class III Indian gaming, video lottery terminal facilities at racetracks, the state lottery and charitable gaming.

#### About the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine

Cornell University’s College of Veterinary Medicine is recognized internationally as a leader in public health, biomedical research, animal medicine, and veterinary medical education and consistently ranked the top veterinary college in the nation. Through its research, education, and outreach programs, such as the Animal Health Diagnostic Center, Cornell is committed to advancing equine health and sports medicine

- [Home](#)
- [About](#)
- [Admissions](#)
- [Academics](#)
- [Research](#)
- [Outreach](#)
- [Hospitals](#)
- [Diagnostic Center](#)
- [Giving](#)



## To stay in the know

### January 2014

- [ALUMNI ASSOCIATION NEWS](#)
- [COLLEGE NEWS](#)
- [ALUMNI NEWS](#)
- [DEVELOPMENT NEWS](#)
- [STUDENT NEWS](#)
- [EVENTS](#)
- [ARCHIVES](#)

[eVETS connect](#) > [Nominate now for the 2014 Salmon Award](#) > [Equine Medical Director](#) > BEST grant

## BEST grant ensures paths less travelled will be explored

A new program will give graduate students and postdoctoral scholars at Cornell University new opportunities for exploring both traditional and nontraditional career options. The Broadening Experiences in Scientific Training (BEST) program will provide information, internships, and other resources to prepare students for careers in industry, government, and communication in addition to traditional academic careers, according to Cornell officials.

The Cornell BEST program has received a \$1.25 million, five-year grant from the National Institutes of Health and will launch in March 2014. The program is collaboratively organized by the Cornell

Graduate School in cooperation with the graduate education office at Cornell's College of Veterinary Medicine.

Application to the program is competitive. Approximately 30-50 participants will be selected for the inaugural year. These trainees will have access to a variety of on- and off-campus programmatic opportunities, including weekend seminars and lectures and deeper, more intensive sessions that can span one or more weeks.

"The goal of these programs is to provide information and experiences that will allow graduate students and post docs to consider a wide range of career paths," said Dr. Joel Baines, the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education and the James Law Professor of Virology at the College of Veterinary Medicine. "In the past, most trainees entered doctoral programs with the intention of establishing their own lab in the future. While this career path is vital to our future, society also needs well educated professionals placed in a variety of areas, including academia, industry, government, public health, and the media, to ensure that decisions and directions are based on scientifically valid, evidence-based information."



To illustrate the variety of career options, the BEST program will highlight four pathways, each led by a faculty mentor or the program's senior director.

- Dr. Bruce Lewenstein, from Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, will lead students in the exploration of Science Communication. Students will learn both how and why to communicate about scientific issues with non-scientists, whether in person or in written, broadcast, video, and web based formats.
- Dr. Alfonso Torres, from the College of Veterinary Medicine, will focus on Governance, Risk and Compliance, connecting students with representatives from government organizations, like the Departments of Agriculture and of Homeland Security, and preparing students to investigate pathogens considered to be bio- and agroterrorism risks.
- Dr. Chris Schaffer, from the College of Engineering, will delve into Science Policy. Trainees may, for example, prepare and pitch a proposal for a new bill to a Congressional representative, with the ultimate goal of bringing the bill to the congressional floor for consideration.
- Susi Varvayanis, Senior Director, will focus on Industry, Entrepreneurship and Management. This pathway will encourage students to immerse themselves in the culture and entrepreneurship of biotech companies, so as to develop a better understanding of the demands faced by professionals who use living organisms to develop commercial products.

Trainees may opt for a single pathway or sample more than one of the pathways in less detail.

"Participation will be tailored to match each student's personal aspirations and interests," said Baines. "The program is structured to encourage people to consider paths that are pursued less often, but that increasingly offer tremendous opportunities for a future of meaningful discovery and professional satisfaction. The skills they learn will be useful both in traditional and nontraditional settings."

- [Home](#)
- [About](#)
- [Admissions](#)
- [Academics](#)
- [Research](#)
- [Outreach](#)
- [Hospitals](#)
- [Diagnostic Center](#)
- [Giving](#)



## To stay in the know

### January 2014

- [ALUMNI ASSOCIATION NEWS](#)
- [COLLEGE NEWS](#)
- [ALUMNI NEWS](#)
- [DEVELOPMENT NEWS](#)
- [STUDENT NEWS](#)
- [EVENTS](#)
- [ARCHIVES](#)

[eVETS connect](#) > [Nominate now for the 2014 Salmon Award](#) > [Equine Medical Director](#) > [BEST grant](#)  
> dolphins

## Study links poor dolphin health to Gulf oil spill

Dolphin health took a toxic nosedive in one of the areas hit hard by the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill, according to a new study led by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) that includes work by Cornell scientists. Published in the



journal Environmental Science & Technology in December 2013, their work makes a strong association between the spill and the deterioration in dolphin health in a region of the Gulf of Mexico that received heavy and prolonged oil exposure.

Testing approximately 30 bottlenose dolphins in Louisiana's Barataria Bay, researchers found nearly half in "guarded or worse" condition, including 17 percent that were not expected to survive. Compared to dolphins tested in Florida's Sarasota Bay, a control site where no oil was observed, Barataria Bay dolphins were five times more likely to have moderate



A dolphin is tested during the NOAA health assessment. Photo provided by NOAA.

to severe lung diseases and suffered uncommon hormonal abnormalities. Researchers at Cornell conducting the hormone tests were unaware of the origin of the dolphins included in the study.

"We observed uncommon disease conditions in Barataria Bay dolphins consistent with petroleum hydrocarbon exposure," said co-author Ned Place, associate professor at Cornell's College of Veterinary Medicine and director of the endocrinology laboratory in the Animal Health Diagnostic Center. "The Barataria Bay population is loyal to the area, and dolphins could have been exposed to oil by direct contact at the surface or through ingestion while feeding."

Barataria Bay dolphins tested in 2011 had severely low adrenal hormones, including cortisol, which maintains homeostasis and spikes during stress, and aldosterone, which maintains water and salt balance needed for muscle and nerve function.

Cornell's Diagnostic Endocrinology Laboratory conducted hormonal analyses on samples collected by a group of scientists and veterinarians led by Lori Schwacke, a NOAA scientist and the paper's first author. Schwacke had previously evaluated hormone concentrations in different dolphin populations prior to the Deepwater Horizon spill, and these studies established the minimum level of cortisol in unaffected dolphins, as measured by the Cornell Diagnostic Endocrinology Laboratory.

Forty-four percent of dolphins from Barataria Bay sampled in 2011 after the spill had a cortisol concentration that was below the established minimum level, whereas all samples from Sarasota Bay dolphins had values above the minimum.

"These results strengthen the argument that the relationship is potentially causative rather than just correlative," said Place. "Their low cortisol levels were especially pronounced because you'd expect relatively high cortisol levels after the handling involved with capturing dolphins. Such low levels suggest these dolphins have damaged ability to respond to stress, which compromises their survival chances. Dolphins in this area will likely have more difficulty reproducing as well. The severe diseases and associated deaths raise strong concerns for the future of Barataria Bay's dolphin population."

The April 2010 explosion at BP's Deepwater Horizon rig about 40 miles off Louisiana's coast spewed oil slicks across 68,000 miles of open water and more than 1,000 miles of coastline.

This study, conducted in August 2011, is part of the Deepwater Horizon Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) being conducted cooperatively among NOAA, other federal and state trustees,

and BP. Funding for the study was provided by BP, and NOAA has shared the collected data with them. BP was not involved in the analysis and interpretation of the data or in the drafting of the paper. According to a statement BP released in December, NOAA “still has not provided BP with any data demonstrating that the alleged poor health of any dolphins was caused by oil exposure.”

Cornell continues to test dolphin samples that were collected in 2013 and sent by NOAA as part of the ongoing NRDA.

- [Home](#)
- [About](#)
- [Admissions](#)
- [Academics](#)
- [Research](#)
- [Outreach](#)
- [Hospitals](#)
- [Diagnostic Center](#)
- [Giving](#)



## To stay in the know

### January 2014

- [ALUMNI ASSOCIATION NEWS](#)
- [COLLEGE NEWS](#)
- [ALUMNI NEWS](#)
- [DEVELOPMENT NEWS](#)
- [STUDENT NEWS](#)
- [EVENTS](#)
- [ARCHIVES](#)

[eVETS connect](#) > [Nominate now for the 2014 Salmon Award](#) > [Equine Medical Director](#) > [BEST grant](#)  
> [dolphins](#) > antioxidant study

## \$1.4 million study will explore antioxidants' pitfalls

As free-radical-forming poisons pile up in our environment and bodies, antioxidants may ward off some of their harmful health effects. But free radicals have a silver lining, say Cornell researchers, and too many antioxidants can do harm. With a \$1.4 million grant from the NIH, they will explore why in a project that could change preventative strategies and treatments for neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's and some forms of cancer.

Starting January 1, 2014, Dr. Carolyn Sevier, assistant professor of molecular medicine at Cornell's College of Veterinary Medicine, will use her discovery of a benefit bestowed by oxygen-derived free-

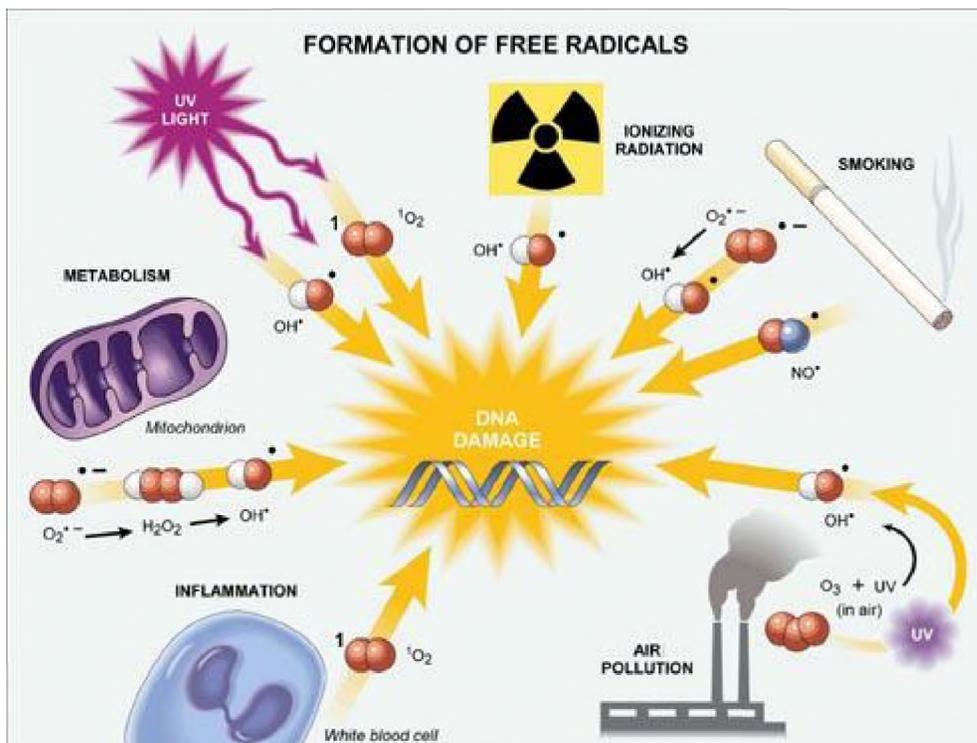


radicals to launch a five-year study mapping how cells deal with oxidative stress. Like food spoils when exposed to oxygen, cells suffer oxidative stress when exposed to more reactive oxygen ions called free radicals than they can handle, which they usually manage partly with certain vitamins and minerals dubbed antioxidants.

“That’s why antioxidants are hot in the popular press and companies push things like pomegranate powder— some think consuming tons of antioxidants improves health, but that’s not necessarily true,” said Sevier. “It’s true that reducing oxidative stress can lessen cell damage. But we’re realizing that free radicals serve as useful messengers to cells, and completely quashing them can keep cells from forming their own protective defenses.”

Free radicals form in the body as products of normal metabolism, but also come from outside sources such as smoking, herbicides, pesticides, and fatty foods. Their accumulation contributes to aging, cancer, and most neurodegenerative disorders.

These unstable oxygen remnants have unpaired electrons that seek partners by taking electrons from other compounds, initiating a chain reaction of electron stealing that damages proteins and DNA. Cells usually detoxify with antioxidants and other defense mechanisms that break down or neutralize free radicals by offering a spare electron. Thus theories formed that suggested eating more antioxidants would ward off disease.



“Sadly this is an oversimplification,” said Sevier. “For every time a study has made adding extra dietary antioxidants look good, another has shown the opposite. Our study seeks to understand this dissonance. Scientists are beginning to realize now that obliterating free radicals with antioxidants can keep cells too complacent to build beneficial protective pathways free radicals normally spur. We want to identify these advantageous pathways.”

Sevier’s study will build on her previous discovery of a cellular protein that acts like a switch free radicals turn on, initiating a signaling cascade that confers cellular benefits. In the wake of the electron-stealing rampages oxidative stress sparks, proteins normally folded into compact shapes deform into unfolded messes, glomming onto other proteins in big tangles. When activated by free radicals, the protein Sevier focuses on, which is called BiP, enhances its activity as molecular chaperone, keeping proteins apart.

“This beneficial signaling pathway actually helps cells cope with oxidative stress,” said Sevier. “A drug targeting BiP in disease states could enhance its function and prevent some of the damage in disease. That may be a more selective and better strategy than just dumping in antioxidants. By finding and understanding more about the good pathways free radicals facilitate, we may find ways to improve treatments for a variety of diseases.”

- [Home](#)
- [About](#)
- [Admissions](#)
- [Academics](#)
- [Research](#)
- [Outreach](#)
- [Hospitals](#)
- [Diagnostic Center](#)
- [Giving](#)



## To stay in the know

### January 2014

- [ALUMNI ASSOCIATION NEWS](#)
- [COLLEGE NEWS](#)
- [ALUMNI NEWS](#)
- [DEVELOPMENT NEWS](#)
- [STUDENT NEWS](#)
- [EVENTS](#)
- [ARCHIVES](#)

[Nominate now for the 2014 Salmon Award](#) > [Equine Medical Director](#) > [BEST grant](#) > [dolphins](#) > [antioxidant study](#) > Lifetime Achievement Award

## Faculty wins lifetime achievement award for modeling epidemiology

Dr. Yrjo Grohn, professor of epidemiology at Cornell's College of Veterinary Medicine, has been honored with a lifetime achievement award for his work in veterinary epidemiology and preventive medicine. As the awardee, he was given the opportunity to build the program for a daylong symposium that features topics related to his work using mathematical modeling to understand the spread of infectious diseases and optimize food production systems.



The Association for Veterinary Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine (AVEPM) presents one Calvin W. Schwabe Award each year. The winner puts together a symposium for the longer AVEPM conference, which draws more than 100 epidemiologists annually. Entitled "The whole is not only more than but very different than the sum of its parts," the symposium honoring Grohn's work took place in Chicago in December, 2013.

"I'm honored to receive this award named after Schwabe, whose pioneering work was an inspiration in my early career," said Grohn. "He inspired me to follow my passion for systems thinking, a style of

problem solving that maps out how factors in a system influence one another within a whole. I look forward to bringing colleagues together for a day of discussing system thinking in epidemiology and to the many more years I plan to explore it."

Grohn has enriched the veterinary epidemiology arena with research shared through a large number of frequently cited publications, including a paper in the renowned journal *Nature* in fall 2013. He is widely known for his pioneering work on mixed models and dynamic programming. He has received continuous USDA funding while simultaneously holding a major NIH grant in the area of public health. A highly regarded educator, he helped lead a series of workshops taught at Cornell and at the triennial International Symposium of Veterinary Epidemiology and Economics in countries throughout the world.

He has served on over 30 PhD committees and supervised numerous postdoctoral research fellows. In 2007 he was bestowed the honor of presenting the Gareth Davis Lecture at the foremost European veterinary epidemiology society. Through numerous publications, presentations and courses over his career of 25 years in veterinary epidemiology and preventive medicine, Dr. Grohn's research and teaching have advanced veterinary epidemiology.

Grohn's colleague Dr. Martin Wiedmann, professor of food science at Cornell, gave the symposium's first talk, discussing the state of research in prevention and control of foodborne and zoonotic diseases. Drs. Renata Ivanek and Cristina Lanzas, two of Grohn's former postdoctoral associates who are now professors followed, describing the transition from lab research to mathematical modeling.

Connecting models back to the real world, Grohn's colleague Dr. Ynte Hein Schukken, professor of epidemiology and herd health at Cornell, followed by discussing how models process the data that feeds into them. Another colleague, Danish economist Dr. Anders Kristenson, then discussed the question of money and how biological models can aid economic optimization and decision-making in farms and other contexts.

Grohn closed by painting the big picture, describing how smaller models can combine to create larger-scale models that could begin mapping out the world's incredibly complex modern food systems and create massive models that could inform strategies for preventing and intervening in foodborne disease outbreaks, a subject he hopes to study for years to come.

- [Home](#)
- [About](#)
- [Admissions](#)
- [Academics](#)
- [Research](#)
- [Outreach](#)
- [Hospitals](#)
- [Diagnostic Center](#)
- [Giving](#)



## To stay in the know

### January 2014

- [ALUMNI ASSOCIATION NEWS](#)
- [COLLEGE NEWS](#)
- [ALUMNI NEWS](#)
- [DEVELOPMENT NEWS](#)
- [STUDENT NEWS](#)
- [EVENTS](#)
- [ARCHIVES](#)

[Equine Medical Director](#) > [BEST grant](#) > [dolphins](#) > [antioxidant study](#) > [Lifetime Achievement Award](#) > Dr. Brett Tillou

## With an entrepreneurial spirit

The Tillou family has a long history with Cornell. Dr. Donald Tillou graduated with the veterinary class of 1944. His son, Dr. Guy Tillou, is a double red graduate, with '72 honors from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and a '78 degree from the veterinary college. Sixty years later—in 2004—his grandson Brett, began his own journey as a Cornell veterinarian.



Three generations of the Tillou family. (From left), Brett DVM '04, Donald DVM '44, and Guy DVM CALS '72/'78

“Cornell is in our blood,” said Dr. Brett Tillou, who is married to Dr. Erin Klene '04, a part-time veterinarian at a local emergency clinic. “Cornell changed my life. It gave me the opportunity to practice in a profession that I wanted since I was 12, and it is where I met the most important person in my life—my wife.”

Brett chose veterinary medicine for many reasons, including the opportunity to problem-solve in the healthcare profession and the opportunity to work with animals. A major factor in the decision, though, was the realization that combining veterinary medicine and entrepreneurship could lead to the ultimate luxuries: being his own boss and making decisions unilaterally. Just over two years ago, after working for his father for seven years, he ignited his plan for freedom with the purchase of his family’s veterinary practice, the Tillou Veterinary Hospital in Hamburg, N.Y.

Serving an active client list of 14,000 companion animals, Brett and his father have inverted the conventional father/son relationship, with Brett assuming responsibility for oversight as well as all strategic and administrative decisions, while his father focuses on patient care as the practice’s second veterinarian.

“The transition was much easier than I expected,” said Brett, although he noted that practice ownership is not for recent graduates and nobody is ever really ready to run a business. “Owning a business is more labor intensive than I expected. But the simple fact that every ounce of extra effort I put in is a windfall for me and my family makes it all worth it.”

In his new role, Brett expects to launch some capital projects in 2014, and noted that he made some immediate changes at the time of conversion: he implemented a new electronic medical records system, resulting in a 100 percent paper-free operation; he updated the computer system; and he adjusted the hours to be more family friendly. He and Dr. Erin have 3 young children, who Brett chuckled, will not be joining them at this year’s Reunion.

“Ithaca is very special to us,” said Brett, who is chairing the Class of 2004 Reunion Campaign. “We are looking forward to a weekend in Ithaca with friends. I am hopeful that many from my class will find their way back to Ithaca so we can catch up.”



- [Home](#)
- [About](#)
- [Admissions](#)
- [Academics](#)
- [Research](#)
- [Outreach](#)
- [Hospitals](#)
- [Diagnostic Center](#)
- [Giving](#)



## To stay in the know

### January 2014

- [ALUMNI ASSOCIATION NEWS](#)
- [COLLEGE NEWS](#)
- [ALUMNI NEWS](#)
- [DEVELOPMENT NEWS](#)
- [STUDENT NEWS](#)
- [EVENTS](#)
- [ARCHIVES](#)

[BEST grant](#) > [dolphins](#) > [antioxidant study](#) > [Lifetime Achievement Award](#) > [Dr. Brett Tillou](#) > Expanding Horizons Support

## Expanding Horizons: eye-opening and mind-expanding

The Expanding Horizons program at Cornell's College of Veterinary Medicine began in 1988, and has sent students to numerous developing countries, including Ghana, Uganda, Madagascar, Thailand, Vietnam, Honduras, and Kenya. Many of the students say that the experience was life-changing and helped to shape their career. Emily Aston '15 characterized her trip to the Amazonian rain forest as the adventure of her lifetime, and the results of her work are featured in this month's International Journal for Parasitology. Daniel Jackson's Expanding Horizon's trip to Nepal will be featured in the next issue of 'Scopes.



These experiences are possible because of the type of students who choose Cornell—students who are self-motivated to help others by solving problems—and also because of the generosity of many supporters. The Lincoln Ellsworth Foundation contributes annually to the program. Dr Karel (Ton) Schat has helped to establish two endowments with help from many alumni, friends, foundations, and corporations. Most recently, the College's Alumni Association has added its own support with a gift of \$50,000 that will help to sustain the program's future, creating the Veterinary Alumni Association Fund for Expanding Horizons.

“The Expanding Horizon's program puts our students in other countries and exposes them to comparative medicine opportunities,” said Dr. Ed von der Schmidt III '79, who is the president of the Alumni Association. “With their newfound knowledge, these students can enlighten their home communities and help direct the future of our profession. Expanding Horizons is one of the highlights of the Cornell program and helps us continue to attract the best and brightest students.”

Historically, the program has been able to fund between five and seven student trips each year. The boost from the Alumni Association will ensure that even more students are able to spend between six and 10 weeks engaging in either veterinary research or hands-on veterinary experience in developing nations every year.

“These experiences provide Cornell students with a broader picture of the role that today's veterinarian plays in society,” said Malcolm Kram DVM '74/CVA and vice president of the Alumni Association. “Expanding Horizons serves to open the eyes of the veterinary student to new and diverse populations of people and their challenges as well as opportunities within our profession that may never before been considered. It also enhances our veterinary college's educational offerings beyond that of routine practice.”

- [Home](#)
- [About](#)
- [Admissions](#)
- [Academics](#)
- [Research](#)
- [Outreach](#)
- [Hospitals](#)
- [Diagnostic Center](#)
- [Giving](#)



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- [ARCHIVES](#)

[dolphins](#) > [antioxidant study](#) > [Lifetime Achievement Award](#) > [Dr. Brett Tillou](#) > [Expanding Horizons Support](#) > Emily Aston

## Veterinary student publishes public health study of Amazonian wild

An adventure of a lifetime led Cornell veterinary student Emily Aston '15 into the heart of the Amazonian rain forest to conduct the most remote study to date of the foodborne and waterborne pathogen *Toxoplasma gondii*. Emerging with findings published online in the International Journal for Parasitology: Parasites and Wildlife in January 2014, she quantified parasite levels in several wildlife species and created a new way of processing the samples using a simpler setup than previous methods.



Toxoplasmosis, a disease caused by the prevalent protozoan *T. gondii*, afflicts humans and animals that come in contact with feces of infected animals or eat their undercooked meat. Aston journeyed to a remote community of indigenous subsistence hunters in the northeastern Peruvian Amazon to explore *T. gondii* prevalence. Testing blood samples from several species they commonly hunt, Aston found that between 17 and 40 percent of hunted animals were contaminated.

“I was most interested in the public health significance,” said Aston, who hails from Rancho Palos Verdes, CA. “These people have little contact

with the rest of Peru. The study site is isolated from civilization, a six-day boat ride from the nearest city. Resources are limited so they rely on the meat they hunt to live. This community was also a perfect home-base for measuring the prevalence of the parasite in a truly wild habitat.”

Until now, no studies have determined the prevalence of *T. gondii* in such a remote setting— prior studies had only looked at zoo animals or wildlife in preservation zones bordering civilization.

To conduct the study, Aston and her team enlisted the help of hunters to collect blood samples on filter papers from the animals they hunted. Overcoming an unexpected obstacle when she was confronted with some unknown types of filter paper, Aston devised a modification to the normal testing protocol that enables researchers to easily adapt testing to a variety of filter paper types.

To reach the site, Aston had to board a cargo ship departing from a rainforest city along a leg of the Amazon River infamous for doubling as a cocaine route. Aston’s ship faced a drug bust near the tri-border between Brazil, Columbia, and Peru. After three days she camped on the loading dock with her team’s valuable equipment, while bats flew overhead. She finally made it to the next leg, where she took a small boat for three days on which four people slept in hammocks hung close enough that they swayed into each other.



Aston became so sick from a parasitic infection herself that she almost had to turn back, but upon arrival, members of the indigenous community helped her fight the infection. Once recovered, she was in charge of processing hunted animals to find parasites and take samples for further lab analysis. In her spare time, she also helped defend chickens from pirating ocelots.

“The hunters gave me a special gift of ocelot meat,” said Aston. “It was chewy but good with lemon juice. Everyone in the community eats hunted meat: there’s a very high probability that some of it is infected. Most infected people with good immune systems won’t show major symptoms. But fetuses and people who are immunosuppressed may face much greater risks. Toxoplasmosis commonly affects the eye, and I met a man nearly blinded from the infection. He has a wife and two daughters and now he can’t hunt. It was devastating to the family. I hope this study can contribute to public health efforts in the area.”

Aston’s research was made possible by a competitive grant through Cornell’s Expanding Horizons program, which gives Cornell veterinary students opportunities to experience veterinary medicine in developing countries. Other funders include the Lincoln Ellsworth Foundation, the KA Schat

Expanding Horizons Fund, the Cornell Einaudi Center, the National Service of Agrarian Health, the Wildlife Conservation Society, the Dirección General de Flora y Fauna Silvestre-Ministerio de Agricultura from Peru, and the USAID through the Emerging Pandemic Threats PREDICT Program.