

Local

What it's like to be a ... Baker City veterinarian

With college students choosing majors and high school students deciding between college or the workforce, this series will highlight one career path each week in August and September.

This week, we introduce you to **Brett Hamilton**, Baker City veterinarian. Brett has been part of the team at Baker Veterinary Hospital located at 3425 10th Street since 1993.

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Gina K. Swartz / The Baker County Press

Veterinarian Brett Hamilton poses with a happy customer.

The BCP: What is your background?

Brett: I grew up in Nampa, Idaho. Went to the University of Idaho. Got my undergrad and after that I went to Washington State. Got my OVMA (Oregon Veterinary Medical Association) after I went to Washington State. After I graduated I came here and I've been here since.

The BCP: So how long does it take to become a veterinarian?

Brett: It took me about seven and a half years but the average is probably 8-12 years.

The BCP: That is about as long as it takes to be a human doctor?

Brett: Well, we are doctors. We do everything they do actually just with more species. I mean, most of the same standards of practice apply. We've got a little more ground to cover in differences in anatomy and physiology.

The BCP: Do you have to do internships like human medical doctors do?

Brett: Yeah, we do. There are more than one kind—some people who are looking at board specialties will do internships at veterinary schools after they graduate. Most just go into practice. During my senior year I did an internship in Bellevue, Idaho. So there is some in practice usually your senior year. Usually people do them where they are interested in entering school, after post graduate or where they might be interested in going into a specific type of practice.

The BCP: What skills, qualifications or education do you need?

Brett: You have to have an undergraduate degree and you have to have a doctor of veterinary medicine from an accredited veterinarian school. Then you need state licenses and national certifications.

The BCP: And do you continue education?

Brett: I do a lot! You've got to be hungry to learn more, never stay the same. You are either getting better at what you do or you're getting worse. Our technology and knowledge is changing all the time.

The BCP: Tell me how a typical day starts for you and how it flows

Brett: Well, that's the best part of our job, truly every day is different. I mean, we have some set routines but we don't plan on staying true to those on

any given day just because we see so much emergency work. We tend to do surgeries in the morning and medical patients in the afternoon but that changes.

The BCP: What is your favorite thing about being a veterinarian?

Brett: I love when people bring in their puppies and their kittens and I think the best part, one of the neat things, is that people's relationships with animals sometimes brings out the best part of that person. We get to see that and that's really cool. We take a lot of pride and it is very exciting to do new things. I can look at what we did, for instance orthopedics, we're doing bone plating fractures that three years ago I wasn't doing and they're so cool. It is so amazing what we can do. We are just doing all these procedures that are cutting edge, like knee surgeries, that weren't previously done here advancing the quality of medicine for our community. It's not only fun but it's challenging. We see our clients and our patients benefiting from it, that's really exciting it keeps you wanting to come to work every day.

The BCP: What is your least favorite thing about being a veterinarian?

Brett: You know, I don't know that I have anything that is my least favorite thing. For a lot of people the concept of euthanasia is really difficult. At times that is probably one of the worst things but sometimes it is truly a gift and a compassionate thing. Even the bad things—a lot of times they're mixed. Most of the animals we get with are fairly easy, some of the owners are a little more difficult, but most of the people we work with are awesome, wonderful I mean truly a pleasure and a privilege to work for.

The BCP: What has been your biggest challenge?

Brett: Trying to be really competent and really good at what you do in a complicated and really diverse occupation. There is so much that is changing all the time it is difficult to stay in front of that. But when you really enjoy it, it's just what you do.

The BCP: How often do you have to work outside of clinic hours?

Brett: All the time. That is part of being a vet in a small community, we don't have an emergency only

facility here like a lot of larger metropolitan areas, that's just part of us, and I think all the vets in town see that as just part of what we do as a community service.

The BCP: What types of animals do you care for?

Brett: We do everything. That is part of the fascination of this type of a practice. We see companion animals, food animals, wildlife, service dogs, guide dogs, drug dogs, exotic animals. We've worked on everything from wallabies, owls, eagles, and llamas to wolves, just all sorts of different species it's part of the fun of what we do.

The BCP: So with regards to the wildlife, say if ODFW trapped a porcupine that needed care they would bring it in to you?

Brett: Occasionally, yep. (Hamilton was unsure if other local vet offices in town do the same.)

The BCP: What is the strangest animal you've cared for?

Brett: Gosh, I don't know. Hedgehogs are kinda weird little critters. Nobody in our practice really does snakes. We don't do a lot of reptile work although we've done some. Wallabies are really cool little animals. I've worked on those in the past. They (any animal) just don't seem all that strange to me I guess at this point.

The BCP: Do you have a funniest story you'd like to tell?

Brett: I don't know. I'd have to think about that. One that you could print is another thing. I can think of a couple funny ones but not that you could print.

The BCP: What is the saddest?

Brett: We deal with sad ones all the time. I honestly don't have a saddest one. In this business we see the absolute best of people and we see the absolute worst of people. Over the years there have been so many abused, terrorized animals and for the most part that has been at the hands of people.

The other big broad category, and sometimes this is true with people, sometimes bad things happen to nice pet owners that do everything right and they just were really unlucky or made one bad judgment and they're sick, their pet is sick and it's all bad. I don't really have a saddest story because unfortunately, I hate to say it but

they are pretty frequent. I wouldn't trade what I do with anyone though. I'm very passionate about what I do. There are frustrations that come with any occupation but in this one the good things way outweigh the bad but the bad are frequent and hard and emotionally taxing. Not only on us (vets) but our staff as well, we develop deep emotional attachments to our patients and their owners. Lots of times we can make it all better but sometimes we can't. Another thing that is a little harder is that the life span of our patients is a lot shorter than that compared to a physician. Not very many people die at the age of 15 being old, so we go through that experience of them coming in when they are a puppy and we see them throughout their life and that's awesome but we also see them at the end.

The BCP: Would you say it is easy or difficult to leave the job at work?

Brett: It's not easy sometimes, that is for sure. It's not uncommon to wake up in the middle of the night thinking about a case, and thinking what I'm going to do different tomorrow. One of the neat things about what we do is it is not easy, we see patients with really difficult medical conditions that are intricate kind of things. You don't just go home and forget about it, you might think about things until you get them right.

The BCP: What advice would you give to for anyone looking at this career path?

Brett: It's like anything. If you're going to be good at it you have to love it. I think if anyone is considering this as a future occupation I think you have to spend time with a veterinarian because I think it is different than what people think a little bit.

You have to be able to get along with people it's not just about animals—it's talking to people about their animals. You also have to be medically sound and there are just a lot of things that determine success. What people judge isn't always how good of a doctor you are, it could be how well you communicate.

The BCP: Any parting thoughts?

Brett: It's a wonderful profession I'm so glad I chose it—but it's not for everybody.

Springing a leak on Court



Photo courtesy of the City of Baker City.

Water floods Court Avenue after a water leak last Thursday morning.

According to Mike Kee, manager of the City of Baker City in his weekly newsletter, "A major water leak occurred just at around 1 a.m. last Thursday morning. Data from the Water Treatment Plant showed that the leak rate was approximately 2000 GPM. Crews had the 6" line repaired before 11 a.m. and spent the remainder of the day rebuilding the road base that the water destroyed."

Crews were still working on the area earlier this week, but the majority of the work appeared to have been completed.

The leak primarily affected the block of Court Avenue in front of business such as Blue Mountain Design.

Show -n- Shine



Kailyn McQuisten / The Baker County Press

Top: a vintage fire truck drew crowds. Next: Troy and Gen Woydziak stand next to son Mabry's truck. Third: Classic cars lined up in front of the Museum looked at home there. Bottom: A bright blue 1947 Chevy owned positioned in one corner of the park garnered attention.