

The story of a camel, a veterinary student and a doctor

By ANN BLOOM
For the Wallowa County
Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — What do a camel, Miss Idaho and a vet at the Enterprise Animal Hospital have in common? A lot, it turns out. At least on Friday, June 4, they did when Burns rancher Carolyn Mathews brought her camel, Matthew, to the veterinary hospital where Dr. Kala Grover, DVM, gelded the animal.

That day, Kim Layne, a fourth-year veterinary student from Washington State University, who was Miss Idaho 2020, had the opportunity to witness the procedure. Layne has ties to Wallowa County from coming to the county to experience the Eagle Cap Wilderness area and whose boyfriend works at the Wallowa Lake Marina. She was doing an externship (a weeklong field experience) at Enterprise Animal Hospital through her veterinary program. She will graduate in 2022.

Camel facts

There are two types of camels: dromedary and bactrian. Mathews explained the easiest way to remember the difference between the two is to think of each camel lying on its side. “The dromedary camel has one hump. When lying on its side, it forms the letter “D”. The bactrian, when lying on its side, forms the letter “B” with its two humps,” she said.

Matthew, a 2-year-old dromedary camel, was accompanied by Gus, a 6-year-old bactrian. Mathews has had camels for about five years, but has prior experience with



Matthew the camel, owner Carolyn Mathews (left), veterinary technician Brenda Johnson (center), Dr. Kala Grover (second from right) and veterinary technician Erica McNall talk during before a medical procedure performed on the camel Friday, June 4, 2021.

Sally Belsinger/Contributed Photo

them from when she lived in Texas. She explained that she also worked with lions, tigers and other exotic animals and trained horses while working for a rancher.

Camels are not as unusual in Oregon as one might expect.

“There are a lot more than people think,” she said.

Camels are social animals and live in herds. Mathews explained how to greet a camel. The person who greets the camel holds a hand out with the back toward the camel, so the camel can smell it. Next, the person reaches out to touch the camel’s shoulder, and stroke it. Camels have rough guard hairs on top of wool, which is shed.

“You don’t want to

approach a camel head on,” she said.

Camels greet each other by blowing in each other’s faces. Next, the person blows in the camel’s face.

“Gus is the kisser,” she said.

Working with camels

Both Grover and Layne have experience working with camels. Layne gained her experience in Tunisia in 2016 working in an international public health and veterinary medicine program.

“Camels are a big industry there. Camels are used in tourism, for milk and for working purposes. It’s cool to see them here to have clinical work done,” she said.

She said she has always

wanted to do mixed-animal medicine and has had that experience through the Enterprise Animal Hospital.

Also, “Joseph is a beautiful area,” she said.

Grover, also a WSU alum (undergraduate school) completed her clinical veterinary work at Oregon State University, and was a veterinarian in Burns when she met Mathews and her camels. Like Layne, Grover has international experience with camels having worked with World Vets in Mongolia.

She said in the Burns area vets are, “few and far between.” She said she has had, “a lot of work with llamas and alpacas. They are similar to camels — they’re all camelids” and admits

camels can have strong personalities. As a veterinarian in general practice in McMinnville she worked with pigs, llamas and alpacas.

Matthew had to be sedated for his procedure, as well as hobbled, for the safety of the staff as well as his own.

“He is just a baby,” Grover said. “Think of a 10- or 11-year-old boy and he has all these sounds and smells that he is not used to,” in addition to the pain of the procedure.

Grover said there are differences between camels and other large animals — horses and cattle — and said she enjoys the excitement of it being different. Horses are her special area of expertise.

“Equine medicine is my passion,” she said.

More facts

Camels can handle extremes according to Mathews. The bactrians are usually found in Central Asia which is known for its extreme cold climate and the dromedary in North Africa. Contrary to popular belief, the camel’s humps are not made of water, but fat stores. When the camel drinks and eats, it converts the fluids and food to fat. As it uses its food stores, the hump diminishes until the camel has the opportunity to eat and drink again, replenishing its hump stores of fat.

A camel can drink 30 gallons of water in 13 minutes and is the fastest-hydrating animal on the planet. Mathews feeds her camels hay (alfalfa is too rich), and said camels are foragers. The trees behind the veterinary clinic received a nice trimming while the camels spent

two nights there. They are not picky eaters. With their thick leathery lips, they can eat thorny, tough plants other animals find disagreeable and inedible.

Camels are full grown when they are 6 or 7 years old and live to be about 17, though some may live longer.

Some people have heard camels spit. Camels have a variety of defense mechanisms; spitting is just one. Mathews said bactrians spit, growl and stomp their feet. Dromedaries spit and regurgitate the contents of their stomachs when they feel threatened. Camels also belch, moan, groan, snort and make a number of other noises.

Another interesting feature of the camel is the hard, heart-shaped callus on its chest. There are also calluses on their knees. These calluses enable air to circulate under the camel when it lays down, serving as a sort of air-conditioning system keeping the animal cool.

The camel also has a third eyelid that it can shut to protect its eyes from sand and shut its nostrils during a sandstorm. According to National Geographic, camels are often referred to as “ships of the desert” and have been used for transportation for thousands of years. They can grow to be more than 6 feet tall at the shoulder and weigh between 880 and 2,200 pounds, depending on the species and gender when fully grown.

An interesting fact to know and tell: the sound used for Chewbacca in the “Star Wars” movies was made by a camel.

EASTERN OREGON SEARCH AND RESCUE

SAR training planned this weekend

Chieftain staff

ENTERPRISE — Eastern Oregon Search and Rescue will hold an annual training at Salt Creek Summit from Friday-Sunday, June 25-27, according to a press release.

Travelers taking the USFS 39 Road to Halfway or Hells Canyon this weekend can expect some delays, along with ATVs, pickups, people and maybe even extra help if trouble occurs. Search and Rescue units from across Eastern Oregon will hold their annual training exercise in the Salt Creek Summit area this weekend.

“This training is a huge value to all of our volunteers to be able to network and train with multiple agencies from Northeast Oregon,” Wallowa County SAR Capt. Brent Neely said. “Participating counties frequently call on each other for mutual aid for specialized rescues or extended searches and having experience training with each other’s teams is invaluable.”

There may be significant traffic and UTV/ATV congestion in and around the Salt Creek Summit parking area during the training time. The parking lot will be open to the public, but parking may be limited due to the volume of SAR equipment and tents staged there.

About 100 SAR volunteers from 10 Eastern Oregon counties (Baker, Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Union, Umatilla, Wallowa and Wheeler) are expected to take part in the exercises. Most will be camping in the Salt Creek Summit area, near where most of the training will take place. Wallowa County SAR volunteers are hosting the event.

The training includes work in fast-tracking, responding to a swiftwater (water rescue) emergency, advanced incident command, land searches, K-9 land searches, civil air patrol searches and searching using a drone.



The Wallowa County Search and Rescue ropes team practices a rescue earlier this year. The county SAR team will host teams from all over Eastern Oregon at Salt Creek Summit for training this weekend.

Wallowa County Search and Rescue/Contributed Photo

“If you plan to recreate or travel in this area, please be aware of this training,” WCSAR event coordinator Paige Sully said. “However serious it may appear, we are not engaged in an actual search and rescue incident response.”

The Wallowa County SAR volunteers have

developed the training exercises that also include equine packing and rescue.

“There are thousands of volunteer hours that go into planning and training at this event,” Neely said. “I want to say ‘thank you’ to all the SAR members for the personal time, energy, and money they

donate to make our north-east Oregon SAR teams the best they can be.”

For more information, contact Ellen Morris Bishop, Wallowa County SAR public relations, at 541-398-1810 or paleobishop@gmail.com; or Paige Sully, Wallowa County SAR, at 541-426-0535.



Wallowa County Chieftain, File

Wallowa Memorial Hospital and Clinics was recently named among the best places to work in health care by Modern Healthcare, earning a spot on the list for the third year in a row.

More accolades for Wallowa Memorial

Hospital is on nationwide best places to work in health care list for third year in a row

By RONALD BOND
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — The awards keep coming for Wallowa Memorial Hospital and Clinics.

WMH was recently named one of the best places to work in health care in 2021 by the publication Modern Healthcare.

According to a press release, it’s the third year in a row WMH has been recognized as one of the nation’s top health care employers. The final list features 150 hospitals nationwide.

WMH Human Resources Director Anna Hayter said the award is particularly special given the challenges posed in the last year by the coronavirus pandemic.

“Receiving the Best Places to Work award is an honor at any time and especially this year considering everything health care has experienced,” she said. “As leaders, we strive to do what is best for employees and make this a best place to work every day but there are times you’re not certain you’re achieving the goal. This award is validation we must be doing it right.”

WMH had not been on the list until the past three years, but Hayter said that was because it had not applied or had staff fill out a survey that is the basis of the list.

“There is a lengthy application process employers

complete every year in order to be eligible to participate in the Best Places to Work survey and prior to three years ago, we hadn’t participated,” she said. “That’s not meant to imply we weren’t an excellent employer. We were then and we still are, as evidenced by our engaged workforce, low turnover and lengthy employee tenure. We knew we were a ‘best place to work’ so we asked our employees to validate that belief and they have — three years in a row.”

Hospital staff are surveyed on a range of topics, and the results of those queries is what places a health care facility on the list.

“The focus areas that the survey questions are based on are in the following categories: Leadership and planning, corporate culture and communications, role satisfaction, work environment, relationship with supervisor, training, development and resources, pay and benefits, and overall engagement,” WMH Communications Director Brooke Pace said.

Hayter said “meaningful work” is part of what makes being on staff at WMH stand out.

“It’s a privilege to support the health care needs of our community and that sentiment is felt from the top of the organization throughout the employee population,” she said. “We provide great wages and benefits and more importantly, we truly care about our employees. We take care of them as if they were family, because they are. The culture of the hospital is one of kindness, care and respect. You couldn’t ask for a better place to work.”