

# Caring for animals like they are her own

Julie A. Williams, BS, LATG, Manager of Animal Resources, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY.

*Ms. Williams talks about her work managing animal resources for in-house and satellite studies and shares her philosophy about putting animal care first.*

### **How did you first become interested in the field of laboratory animal science?**

Just before I began to work for Vassar College, I was involved in a car accident. During my convalescence, a good friend told me about a job that was available at Vassar working with animals. Since I always had an interest in science and animals, I applied for the job. I interviewed for the position still sporting a limp from the accident a month before.

### **You have worked at Vassar College for the duration of your career, first as a caretaker and now as the manager of a much larger combined facility. Describe your typical workday.**

My typical workday consists of making sure all of the animals and the staff are in good stead. I meet with staff and we discuss any issues or problems and their plans for that day. I field calls and emails from principal investigators and outside contacts. I handle any issues or requests that come up. I also handle the breeding of our two rodent colonies, Koletsky rats and Zucker rats. When a study needs to be set up, I handle that as well. Every day is different, which I enjoy very much.

### **You also work as a satellite project manager for various pharmaceutical and university animal research organizations. What does this work entail?**

This work consists of allocating research space at Vassar College to other institutions and running their studies in our facilities. My job is to maintain communication with the scientists whose studies are being done at Vassar. I have collaborated with Columbia University as well as other smaller research institutions. I enjoy the intellectual stimulation provided by the different studies that are conducted here, and I also enjoy making new contacts in the field.

### **Besides your work in lab animal science, you also have worked with large animals, and you even have your own flock of sheep. How does the experience of tending to your own animals differ from that of tending to laboratory animals?**

I would say the experience does not differ very much. In the laboratory animal facility we have an entire staff to care for the animals, whereas I must care for my own animals myself. I make sure that my animals are well fed and clean and that they experience as little stress as possible; I do the same for the animals at Vassar. Michael Hayre taught me many things, and this is one of them: you can't expect good science



to come from mediocre husbandry. Top-notch care, coupled with reduction in stress, yields happier, healthier animals. I believe we owe this much to the animals we use.

### **As of October 2013, you will have worked in the lab animal field for 25 years. What do you think is the most valuable thing you have learned during your extensive career?**

I have learned that working in animal science is not like other industries. It's a bit like farming or ranching: the animals come first. This means that 365 days a year, no matter how ill you feel or how tired you may be, the work must be done. They cannot clean or feed themselves; we must do it for them. I sleep well at night when I know that all of the animals have been fed, cleaned and cared for with respect. I also believe that we should not only meet the guidelines for the care of animals, but strive to surpass them. One of the things I like about my position is the flexibility to make improvements to animal housing and care that will make the animals that much more comfortable, which in turn makes me the same.