

Sharing her passion with others

Tonja Marie Henze, MS, CMAR, RLATg, Facilities Coordinator, Division of Animal Resources, University of Illinois, Urbana, IL

Ms. Henze talks about the joys and challenges of her job and realizing the importance of speaking out about her passion for laboratory animal care.

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

When I was in high school my mother advised me not to go into the field of laboratory animal care, because she had worked in this field and predicted it would become more and more regulated; she thought I should do something with fewer applicable rules. I don't know if I would have even known about the field if I hadn't been exposed to it through my mother. Like many teenagers, I did what I wanted to do instead of listening to her, and I don't have any regrets about my decision.

What aspect of your job do you enjoy the most? What aspect do you find the most challenging?

There are three main aspects of my career that I love. The first is seeing science in action. When research that was performed at my company is published, I feel proud of the combined efforts of so many people to find more and more keys to unlock the mysteries that still exist around us. You never know what key piece of information could change the world by curing cancer, becoming the next sustainable fuel, protecting the ozone or nourishing the hungry. The second aspect that I love is interacting with so many people. In a university setting, we have great minds and

new energy around us all the time. Experts in our fields share their knowledge with future generations. The animal care team, like a family, supports one another and our common goals. Research and animal care comprise a partnership, with each dependent on the other for success. The third aspect I love is training. From hands-on instruction of new staff to helping a study group prepare for an American Association for Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS) certification exam, I really enjoy sharing what others have helped me to learn.

What I find most challenging is keeping up with all the changes in the field: new specialties, a diverse selection of animal models, constantly updating equipment options, revised regulations, new computer applications, forming collaborations and an emphasis on 'outside the box' thinking. I find I want to absorb it all, but I must focus on what applies to me or my unit operations directly.

Tell us more about your work with AALAS.

I have been a member of the Central Illinois Branch of AALAS continuously since I entered the field in 1988. I was newsletter editor for many years before the internet, when the newsletter was an important mode of communication within the field. I have been the Technician Branch Representative for the past 4 years, working to relay information between the National AALAS office and the animal care technicians. I am currently serving on the AALAS Committee



for Technician Awareness and Development board; this committee supports animal care technicians in various ways, such as by providing events for them during the national AALAS meeting. Previously, I served on the AALAS Certification and Registry Board, was a member of a round table discussion at last year's national AALAS meeting and wore several other hats as well. Through AALAS, I have met colleagues across the country whom I can contact for advice or expertise when needed.

Is there anything else you would like to share with *Lab Animal* readers?

There was a time when I did not tell people I met what I did for a career, in order to avoid a situation in which I'd have to address the concerns voiced by some about animal use in research. Over time, I realized that avoiding such a situation was not the answer and that education is a part of my career. It has taken me some time, but now I convey my passion for quality animal care to anyone I meet.