

Mr. Mitch Potter, a third year student at Auburn University's College of Veterinary Medicine, won first place in the interdisciplinary category of DHHS Secretary's Award for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. The national writing competition challenges veterinary students to come up with solutions to public health problems using veterinary medicine and other health disciplines.

What attracted you to veterinary medicine?

I have always had a fondness for animals, and my mom was in the medical profession. Growing up I always wanted to be a veterinarian but during my undergraduate I didn't pursue it. After graduating I took a job that was less than fulfilling for me. I still had the desire to be a vet and my wife encouraged me to go back to school and apply for veterinary school. I did and things have worked out really well for me since then. I couldn't be happier with my decision.

What attracted you to this project?

I enjoy research and writing, and I love competition. This project is exciting because it gives students the opportunity to start from scratch and develop their own ideas for implementing a program that could have a positive impact on the health and well being of other people (and animals!). I think that is why most students of health professions are where they are – because they have an interest in helping others.

Why do you think veterinarians are specially trained to address public health issues?

Veterinarians are involved in so many aspects of public health. Emerging public health risks are often detected first in animal populations. In addition the health and protection of our food animal resources has

a huge impact on food animal producers, the consumers buying the products, and the economy of our country. Finally, zoonotic diseases are something that we as veterinarians not only need to be aware of, but also have an obligation to educate the public about. The veterinary oath states that we are to use our knowledge and skill for the benefit of society, and an important aspect of that is public health.

How does it feel to win first place in a national writing competition?

I can't even begin to tell you how excited we are to have won this competition. We felt like we had a very good project, but the level of competition was so high we certainly did not get our hopes up for first place. Our primary goal for this project was to put together a program that would have a positive impact on people and animals in addition to being practical. We felt like we met our goals, and from there just put it in the hands of the judges. We are both quite honored to have been selected first.

What are your career goals?

My career goals right now are to pursue an internship in small animal medicine followed by a residency. However as I have learned from the last 10 years, it is very difficult to predict where you will be 10 years from now. One thing I know for certain is that I have chosen a profession that will be exciting and rewarding and I will love every day of practicing veterinary medicine.

You can find writing guides and an idea bank to get you started for the 2006 competition at www.aavmc.org. Click Awards and Scholarships under the Students and Admissions section or contact Charlotte Hendrix for more information.