

Unique, Inclusive and Mobile—The Abelts

My relationship with the Drs. Jeff and Susan Abelt of the Leipers Fork Veterinary Services, LLC began with a Pig Rodeo in my back yard. I own a pot belly pig of mixed heritage that weighs around 400 pounds, named Jethro. Jethro needed his toe nails cut and shaped and his tusks cut. This would not be easy because Jethro requires anesthesia and he is an anesthesia sponge. Before the Abelts arrived, finding a vet who would work with pigs was unheard of here in Williamson County.

Upon arrival, Dr. Jeff requested a bucket, then jumped upon Jethro's back with a syringe between his teeth, firmly put the bucket over Jethro's head and gave him a shot, while riding Jethro holding the bucket in place. Meanwhile, Jethro was squealing and running all over the place trying to dislodge Dr. Jeff, who, to his credit, stuck to the back of my pig like he had Velcro on his pants. During the hullabaloo, Dr. Susan took a picture of Dr. Jeff for future publication, to which he strenuously objected while I was laughing so hard my sides were hurting while tears streamed down my

cheeks; I was no help at all.

Eventually, Jethro succumbed to the medication and took a nice nap while his tusks were trimmed and toe nails cut and nicely shaped. And I had a veterinary service for life.

Dr. Jeff and Dr. Susan met each other during the first day of student orientation at the University of Minnesota Veterinary College, in the fall of 1982. Dr. Susan was one of very few women enrolled in the vet program at the time. In fact, there were no sororities in the veterinary college because there were very few women until 1982 on campus, so she pledged to the Alpha Si as a fraternity sister, with Jeff who is an Alpha Si fraternity brother. Might as well, right?

The Abelts married in 1984, graduated in 1986 and from there, they went to Cloquet, Minnesota where they opened their own clinic and began the work they love. After buying a farm, they had two boys, Jason and Nathan. They later adopted two more children, Shaquisha and William, half-siblings who had never lived together until Susan and Jeff opened their arms and

took them into their family.

A quirky set of circumstances—laughingly referred to the Eternal Joke—allowed them to sell their farm in Minnesota for twice the selling price and buy a farm near Leiper's Fork. That's when Abelts began to research a way to work within their new community and provide a service to meet the needs of clients with a higher level of service than found in a large clinical setting. Their research led them to understand that technology had evolved to the point that every diagnostic tool needed to effectively treat animals could be put into a truck and thus, the mobile vet service was born.

Between the two doctors, they have 48 years of experience ranging from horses, cattle and other livestock, to exotic animals, to domestic dogs and cats. Their delightful sense of humor and ability to work together as a team builds a solid foundation for trust in their expertise.

When asked about the most important thing that folks need to know about their critters, Dr. Jeff put special emphasis

upon re-emerging diseases amongst our animal friends. Several diseases like cat scratch fever and Rocky Mountain spotted fever from tick bites and even Bubonic plague from flea bites have resurfaced in the United States. There is a significant rise in upper respiratory infections in cats and in general infectious diseases in dogs. Many preventable infections are seen due to complacency about vaccinations especially in puppies and kittens. While a lot of attention has been paid to the risks of vaccination in the media, there has been little discussion of the consequences of vaccine avoidance to the overall health of our pet population. It's something to seriously consider as a pet owner.

For more information about the Leipers Fork Veterinary Services, go to www.leipersforkvets.com. The basic cost of a home visit is affordable for any budget and your beloved animals will receive excellent care. ☘

Robin Lockwood is a Master Herbalist, a Plant Spirit Medicine practitioner and a Daghantu (weather worker) in the Cherokee tradition.