

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY

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Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture Highlight: Dr. Rebekah Hartfield

By: Betty Thompson

CHANDLER—Growing up in Bridgeport, Texas, Dr. Rebekah Hartfield never saw herself becoming a veterinarian, much less inspiring others to become one.

Her love for animals began at a young age, when she first learned to ride horses.

“I was homeschooled and went to my grandparents’ house every day,” Hartfield said. “My grandma is the one who taught me to ride horses.”

Even though her grandma taught all four sisters to ride horses, Hartfield is the one who truly fell in love. She began competing in Quarter Horse shows and judging contests through 4-H.

As she grew older, her love and passion for equine also grew. It seemed fitting that she would study Equine Science when she went off to college.

However, after a semester at North Central Texas College, Hartfield started to feel it was not for her.

“I wanted to train horses and ride,” Hartfield said, “so, I left school and went to Colorado to work as a horse trainer at a dude ranch.”

She spent a summer in Colorado taking people on trail rides, breaking horses and teaching people how to ride.

As much as she enjoyed being a wrangler, she was surrounded by peers on break from college. Hearing their excitement to return to school encouraged her to give it another shot.

After Hartfield returned to Texas, she obtained an associate’s degree in equine science and a veterinary assistant degree, and began working as a vet tech at a local clinic.

She loved her work at the clinic, but it was not until her fiancé at the time—now husband, Preston, encouraged her to go to veterinarian school that Hartfield had ever considered becoming a veterinarian herself.

She went on to earn her bachelor's degree in animal science from Texas A&M, but Hartfield said she knew then it would be a long, hard journey to becoming Dr. Hartfield.

“After my first biochemistry test at Texas A&M, I thought ‘there is no way I will ever be able to get into veterinary school,’” Hartfield said. “After my second biochemistry test I was feeling even worse about those odds.”

Hartfield said her faith in God is what kept her going after not being accepted to veterinary school the first year.

“When I didn't get into veterinary school the first year, I thought ‘maybe I heard God wrong, maybe I was supposed to do something else with my life,’” Hartfield said. “But there it was again, that burning desire in my heart. I knew I couldn't give up.”

A year later, Hartfield was accepted to the veterinary program at Oklahoma State University (OSU) in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Her total journey to becoming a veterinarian was 11 years.

She and Preston fell in love with Stillwater, and the university and decided to make it home. They purchased a 40-acre farm near Chandler, where they have horses, cattle, pigs, goats, several dogs and a cat. Her husband recently left the oil field to train horses full time, a passion they both share.

During her fourth year of vet school, a friend asked her for book recommendations for her 11-year-old daughter who was interested in becoming a veterinarian. To Hartfield's surprise, she found very few children's books about veterinarians.

Not long after that, her sister Sarah called and asked for ideas for a graphic design project. It was then Hartfield realized she could write children's books and have her sister illustrate them.

The first book was inspired by her own pig Rosie, who was sick on their farm when her niece Abby came to visit. Since August, over 1,500 copies have been sold of “Rosie the Pig” across Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas.

Hartfield said the Doctor Hartfield Veterinary Book Series will contain six books, each one about a different animal, and all of them based on events that have taken place on their farm.

The remaining books in the series will feature a horse, dog, cat, goat and a cow.

Hartfield said the goal of the books is to educate readers about veterinary medicine, instruments they use, and practices for different animals. All books include educational tools like a quiz to help summarize what they have learned and a glossary of terms that builds with each book.

Additionally, a portion of the proceeds from the book go directly towards the Doctor Hartfield Veterinary Book Series Mixed Animal Scholarship. This scholarship is specifically for a veterinary student wanting to practice in a mixed-animal rural setting. The first scholarship will be given out this April at the OSU-Veterinary Teaching Hospital awards banquet.

Since the release of “Rosie the Pig,” Hartfield has read the book to classes in approximately 30 schools across Oklahoma, in addition to her full time job at the Cushing Veterinary Clinic, and she has several more lined up.

She does not have to wonder if she is making a difference, she hears from readers on Facebook, is tagged in photos of children reading the book and even has visitors to the clinic who tell her how much they enjoy the book.

The series has also caught the attention of the Ag in the Classroom (AITC) program in both Oklahoma and Texas. Oklahoma’s AITC purchased several books, and Texas has asked for her to do skype calls with some classes when they use it in their curriculum.

But even though they are written as Children’s books, Hartfield hopes these books will serve as an inspiration to readers of all ages. She also offers information and resources about becoming a vet on her website, doctorhartfield.com, where the Doctor Hartfield Veterinary Book Series is sold.

“Even if you don’t grow up wanting to be a veterinarian, I don’t think it’s ever too late to decide to go,” Hartfield said. “I don’t think you should ever put a limit on that—I didn’t decide until my 20s. There is a shortage of veterinarians in rural areas, and I’m hoping to help with that.”

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Editor’s note: This is part of a continuing series of stories on Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture. The project is a collaborative program between the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food & Forestry and Oklahoma State University to recognize and honor the impact of countless women across all 77 counties of the state, from all aspects and areas of the agricultural industry. The honorees were nominated by their peers and selected by a committee of industry professionals.



Photo Caption: Dr. Rebekah Hartfield is the author of “Rosie the Pig,” a children’s educational book on veterinary medicine. *Photo Credit: Crystl Percell—Crystl's Photography and Design*



Photo Caption: Dr. Rebekah Hartfield’s love for horses began at a young age and developed into a career as a veterinarian. *Photo Credit: Crystl Percell—Crystl's Photography and Design*