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## A Growing Practice for Pets and People

**MUCH OF VETERINARY MEDICINE** involves looking for clues and solving puzzles—because the patients can't say what's wrong with them. At Quitman Animal Clinic, there's almost always a mystery waiting to be solved.

"They can't talk to you, but you can connect with them. The animal-human bond is strong," says veterinarian Randal Bennett, co-owner of Quitman Animal Clinic. Even so, when presented with difficult cases, he says, it can take a team.

And QAC has the team for the job.

In addition to co-owners Bennett and Jeremy Smith, QAC's 30 employees continually train in animal sciences and customer service. Like many investigators, these clinicians are armed with technology and equipment. But they're also fortified with an uncommon compassion for their dog, cat, sheep, goat, horse, cow and pig patients—a compassion that extends to their human customers, too.

As one of the largest practices in East Texas, QAC uses the latest diagnostic tools, but it's the clinic's people that make it great. Teamwork, a solid work ethic and heart are required of all staff. "We can train them on all of the rest," Bennett says.

And in fact, they do. QAC has more certified veterinary technicians than any other independently owned practice in Texas. With an emphasis on continual training and modern diagnostic equipment, Bennett says, "We can get a work-up on a dog and have answers in an hour. That speed is unheard of in the human side of medicine." The clinic's five veterinarians share insights on complex cases, which helps them piece together treatment plans.

Bennett, a graduate of the Louisiana State University School of Veterinary Medicine, is the senior practitioner at the clinic. He purchased the established Quitman business from Joe Dawson in 1999. An auspicious year, that's also when Smith first began his veterinary education and was accepted to Texas A&M University's College of Veterinary Medicine. After graduation, Smith joined QAC in 2003, later becoming a co-owner.

Although self-proclaimed polar opposites, the co-owners complement one another and mesh well to embrace their joint philosophy and mission. "It's to grow ourselves and the people we serve," Smith says. "You'd think that if you ask what the mission statement is for an animal clinic, there would be ani-



**2.** Veterinarian Randal Bennett checks in with vet tech Juan Perales before he scrubs up to perform a procedure.



**2.** Veterinarian Jeremy Smith analyzes test results with vet tech Megan Young.

**3.** QAC employees take a quick break from an all-staff training session.



mal stuff in it.” Of course, he explains, caring for the animals is the overarching business, but he adds, “When we really focus on growing people, that’s when it’s the best.”

Who are the people they focus on growing? Well, everybody they encounter. First, Bennett says, it begins with the employees. “It’s important to not only be a source of income but to be there for them,” he says. Part of that investment is the clinic’s weekly one-hour all-staff meetings. “We have communications training, veterinary training and we relay practice news. These meetings allow us to center on connecting with the staff.”

At the community level, QAC hosts an annual pet fair as a thank-you to the community and clients. The fair celebrates the pet-human bond and is all about animals and fun. In the past they’ve had live music, prize giveaways, bounce houses, a petting zoo, hamster and wiener dog races, puppet and magic shows, a rock climbing wall, and other activities. The fair has also included exciting animal visitors like alligators, camels and falcons. Each year the lineup is different but well received by fairgoers that in some years have numbered some 800 people. In fact, it’s one of the larger events in Quitman.

Bennett says the event could not be successful without the help of many of the clinic’s talented clients, like those in the tractor club, or the support of the police department, the city

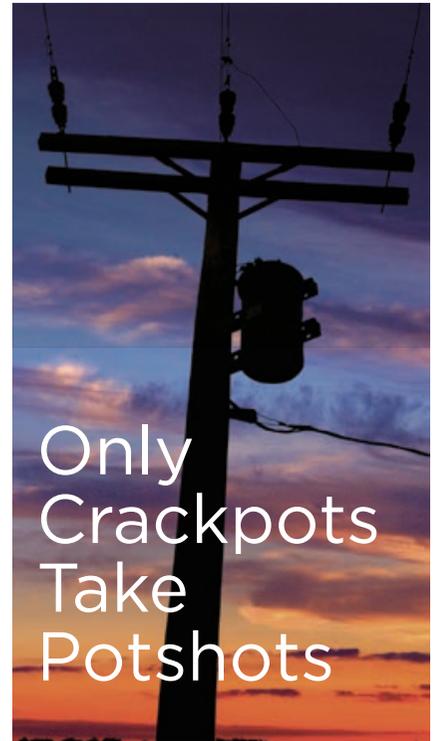
and many others. A large component of the pet fair is the volunteerism of the local humanitarian groups like Kiwanis Club and Key Club. “Years later, it still tends to be that event that brings people together, and that was always our goal,” Bennett says.

Both doctors have invested in the community in their personal lives as well. Smith is president of the Quitman Independent School District board, and Bennett has served on the chamber board, as a city councilman and on the Wood County Development Board.

A hallmark of QAC’s approach allows customers to bring an animal in without an appointment, except for surgeries, dental cleanings or if they require a certain doctor. Enabled by their level of staffing, Bennett says, “You can make an appointment, but you can walk in anytime and be seen.”

QAC also employs cloud-based technology. Doctors can tap into and review patient records from anywhere in the world. And with a feature called My Portal, clients can review animal medical records online as well as informative articles on animal health and behavior. The clinic hopes to make pet health easy for pet owners.

“It’s about pets, but it’s also about people and about their livelihoods, and about being there for them and seeing them grow,” Bennett says. “We have a certain responsibility as veteri-



## Only Crackpots Take Potshots

It doesn't take a crack shot to hit an electric insulator or transformer, just a crackpot. Careless shooters taking potshots at electric equipment can cause major problems for your electric cooperative. Here's why:

**You inconvenience** fellow consumer-members whose electricity has been disrupted.

**This could** be a matter of life and death to someone on a life-support system or who is hit by a stray shot.

**Damage** to electrical equipment is very expensive to repair. Lines may be cut or weakened from a shot, and they may sag or break, becoming a severe hazard for anyone who comes into contact with the line.

**Broken** insulators can cause power outages that are hard—and expensive—to find.

**Enjoy** your sport, but be a responsible hunter.

**Wood County EC encourages you to always practice safety.**



### Quitman Animal Clinic

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Quitman 75783  
quitmananimalclinic.net  
info@quitmananimalclinic.net  
(903) 763-2315

#### Hours

**Monday–Friday:**  
7:30 a.m.–noon  
and 1–5:30 p.m.  
**Saturday:** 8 a.m.–noon  
**Sunday:** Closed

narians—more than we even realize at times.”

Smith tells a story about a client that has stuck with him. A woman became devoted to properly caring for her beloved dog, Nipper, who had developed diabetes and required attentive care. She consistently checked in with Smith to make sure she was providing the very best care. During that time, the woman was herself diagnosed with a life-threatening disease and required a grueling treatment plan. “I firmly believe that she got through her treatment because she had to get up every day to give that dog insulin,” Smith says. “People’s health improves when their pets need them. Pets are such a big part of people’s lives. This gives them a reason to get up and get going.”

Bennett and Smith say they could tell countless more stories about the people they meet through the livestock and pets they treat and care so much about. At the core, the practice can’t, and does not, separate the two.

“It’s been a very rewarding profession because it’s an investigative process, and it’s new and exciting every single day,” Bennett says. “It’s about pets, but it’s about people.” ■

# Beware of Overhead Power Lines on Farms

**POWER LINES POSE** a major hazard for farmers. Lines over roads and rural areas have a minimum clearance of 18 feet but just 12.5 feet over residential private property.

Before working in a field or around shops or grain bins, always take the time to note the location of power lines so that you can make sure to remain a safe distance from them.

## **To stay safe around overhead power lines, farm operators and workers must:**

- ▶ Always use a spotter when operating large machinery near lines.
- ▶ Use care when raising augers or grain truck beds around power lines.
- ▶ Keep equipment at least 10 feet from lines—at all times, in all directions.
- ▶ Inspect the height of farm equipment to determine clearance.
- ▶ Always lower extensions to the lowest setting when moving loads.
- ▶ Never attempt to move a power line out of the way or raise it for added clearance.
- ▶ Call the electric co-op immediately if a power line is sagging or low.
- ▶ If contact is made with a power line, remember that it is almost always safest to stay on the equipment. Make sure to warn others to stay away and call the co-op immediately.
- ▶ The only reason to exit is if the equipment is on fire. If this is the case, jump off the equipment with your feet together, avoiding touching the ground and vehicle at the same time. Then, still keeping your feet together, “bunny hop” away.
- ▶ If you see someone’s equipment in contact with a power line, the best help you can give is from a safe distance. Make sure to yell out to, signal or call the equipment operator to make sure he or she remains in the vehicle, and notify the cooperative immediately. ■



JENNY SWANSON | ISTOCK.COM

## **WOOD COUNTY ELECTRIC CO-OP**

### **CONTACT US**

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**Email** info@wcec.org  
**Web** wcec.org

### **CEO/General Manager**

Trey Teaff

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an  
Outage**

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866-415-2951

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### **ABOUT WOOD COUNTY EC**

Founded in 1938, WCEC owns and maintains more than 5,140 miles of line to provide electric service to over 38,000 meters in parts of nine counties: Camp, Franklin, Hopkins, Rains, Smith, Titus, Upshur, Van Zandt and Wood counties.

### **MEMBER BENEFITS AND SERVICES**

- Online account access and bill payment
- Paperless E-Bill services
- Free bill-paying app
- Visa, Mastercard and Discover accepted
- SmartPower prepay electric system
- Scholarships and youth programs
- Safety and energy conservation programs
- Operation Round-Up community grants

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## Fall Brings National Farm Safety and Health Week

**EACH YEAR SINCE 1944**, the third week of September has been recognized as National Farm Safety and Health Week. This initiative was launched by the National Safety Council and has been proclaimed as such by each sitting U.S. president since Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the first document.

This year, National Farm Safety and Health Week is September 19–25, promoted by the National Education Center for Agricultural Safety to help protect the nation’s more than 2 million farm employees.

The agricultural sector is still the most dangerous in America, according to 2019 data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, which reveals that there were 573 fatalities, or an equivalent of 23.1 deaths per 100,000 workers that year.

Farmworkers are at high risk for injuries, work-related lung diseases, heat exposure, confined-space hazards, noise-induced hearing loss, struck-by and fall hazards, skin diseases, and certain cancers associated with chemical use and prolonged sun exposure, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

The designated week in September corresponds to harvest season for many farm operations and is an apt time to remember safety guidelines.

The Upper Midwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center offers useful checklists for farm safety, including one called Stop-Think-Act, that are relevant nationwide.

“This is a simple yet powerful safety tool that encourages everyone on the farm to consider the task or chore at hand, to ask themselves how their own actions could contribute to a

### Stop-Think-Act Checklist

#### Stop

- ▶ What could go wrong?
- ▶ How bad could it be?
- ▶ Has anything changed?

#### Think

- ▶ Do I clearly understand the task?
- ▶ Am I physically and mentally ready?
- ▶ Do I have the right tools and equipment?

#### Act

- ▶ Make it safe.
- ▶ Use the right tools.
- ▶ Follow the proper procedures.
- ▶ Reduce risks.
- ▶ Stop the task if it cannot be done safely.

safe and productive outcome and stop if it can’t be done safely,” UMASH writes.

The Stop-Think-Act checklist can be downloaded from the UMASH website and distributed on farms. It’s meant to be completed before approaching a job.

Other useful and printable checklists cover topics such as working alone, antimicrobial resistance and preventing building fires.

This September and always, take time out for safety to protect farmworkers and family members from harm. ■

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# Oh Those Winks, Blinks and Flickers

**WE OFTEN HEAR** members express concern over annoying “blinks” caused by quick power losses. These happen quickly, in just the blink of an eye. They can cause the lights to flicker but are frustrating for other reasons. If electronics like digital clocks, microwaves, computers, TVs and other devices don’t have battery backups, they may require resetting. So what causes these blinks?

Wood County Electric Cooperative has 5,100-plus miles of line winding through nine counties in East Texas to bring power to homes and businesses. In a mostly rural area like ours, there are numerous birds, squirrels, snakes and other curious animals that can make contact with those lines and cause power interruptions.

Wind and lightning can also cause blinks, as can tree branches and line contact from foliage. Any of these can disrupt the flow of electricity with a gust of wind or an animal in the wrong place. When any of these acts of nature disrupt the flow of electricity, circuit reclosers stop power temporarily and then reset. That’s a blink. What you probably didn’t know, though, is that this breaker action helps avoid much longer outages.

Most events that cause blinks are uncontrollable. However, there are a few things we humans can do to prevent them.

Be on the lookout for tree limbs and vines that are touching power lines or anything else that could be disturbing the stream of electricity. WCEC right-of-way crews work year-round in a challenging environment to mitigate potential causes of power interruptions, but they can’t lay their eyes on the entire system every year. They often rely on members to call in and report issues.

In addition to foliage, animals and weather, humans can also cause degradation to the system by damaging underground lines. A simple call to the Texas Excavation Safety System before digging can prevent interaction with a line. Call 811 or 1-800-DIG-TESS two business days before you plan to dig to ensure you won’t come across any underground lines.

It’s also important to note that frequent blinking could be an indication of a system problem. Members who notice frequent blinks should try to record the times and dates of the instances and then make a report to the cooperative for troubleshooting. It could be the sign of a damaged insulator going bad or some other issue.

Because of their many possible causes, blinks will never be completely eliminated. However, some of the aggravation from them can be reduced through proactive measures.

To avoid losing electronic data on specific equipment during blinks, use an uninterruptible power supply, a device that maintains continuous electric power to computers. The UPS remains inactive until a power failure occurs and then immediately switches over to the alternative source. The units are intended to run just long enough to provide power through a blink and also allow users to safely shut down a computer in the event of an outage.

UPS units come in a variety of sizes, ranging from those that will back up a single computer to units that can power complete data storage systems, and can be purchased from about \$70 and up at office and computer supply stores.

To solve the annoying flashing clocks, consider buying a digital clock with a built-in battery. These work much like a UPS, providing power through a blink to eliminate the annoyance of resetting your clock. ■



## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

**Labor Day**  
Monday,  
September 6

Our offices will be closed in observance of the holiday.

**Patriot Day**  
Saturday,  
September 11

**National Hunting and Fishing Day**  
Saturday,  
September 25

SWISHER EC