



Equitarian Initiative

## Guatemala

By Rob Franklin, DVM



A popup tent is utilized by Laurie Franklin and Kristi Strickland to provide a venue for children's outreach

**Jalapa, Guatemala**

**Day One: February 23, 2013**

The Texas Equine Veterinary Association (TEVA) sent a volunteer team of nine people to Guatemala for a second TEVA-sponsored Equitarian Initiative trip. Members of the Guatemalan Equitarian project assembled in Dallas on Saturday February 23, before flying together to Guatemala City. The group was a mixture of veterinarians, vet students and volunteers. The four volunteer veterinarians were - Chris Brasmer, Tammy Vretis, Kent Arnold and Rob Franklin; two 4th year veterinary students from Texas A&M - Kim Aeschlimann and Scott Fleming; an industry representative from MWI - Ed Strickland; two volunteers - Kristie Strickland and Laurie Franklin, to work with the children.

Our initial plans involved returning to our headquarters in the historic town of Antigua and working in collaboration between leaders of "World Horse Welfare," the British charity that trains local farriers and saddlers and local veterinary contacts Drs. Jaqui and Jorge. However, we learned the day before we left that that we would be seeing twice as many animals as we had originally expected (600 vs. 300) and we would be operating out of the state of Jalapa - 4 hours to the east of our initial project. Jaqui and her friend Carlos Castellano did an amazing amount of organization with the campesinos to prepare for our trip. This change in plans required last minute reservation adjustments and improvising on our supplies.

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### MISSION STATEMENT

*Equitarian Initiative prepares volunteer veterinarians worldwide to deliver health care and education to improve the health, nutrition, productivity, and welfare of horses, donkeys and mules, and to empower their care providers for sustainable change.*



## Equitarian Initiative

Nonetheless we were looking forward to helping so many people.

The TEVA group arrived in Guatemala City and hired porters to help clear customs. Our bags, like many of the volunteer philanthropic groups that visit third world countries, led custom agents to believe that they may be worth searching. The agents ended up confiscating all of our donated vaccine and permitted us to bring in the remainder of our medications and equipment. It was clear they were not sure what they were looking for but since they understood the concept and value of vaccination, that is what they took. We were thankful to retain the rest of our goods and pressed on. Attempts to have the vaccine released from the authorities by Dr. Jorge, Dr. Jaqui and Carlos over the next 4 days were not fruitful. Fortunately, our hotel in Antigua had kept leftover vaccines from the trip in October allowing several hundred equines to be vaccinated despite the circumstances.

The group spent a relaxed Sunday morning wandering around the UNESCO heritage town of Antigua, recovering from the previous day's travels and preparing for the week's work ahead. The streets of Antigua are lined with hundred-years-old cobblestones and filled with people bustling about trying to sell their wares to travelers and locals alike. Horses with hand rigged harnesses pull carts around the town square.



**Our local transportation and driver. Guatemalan veterinarians Drs. Jaqui and Estuardo, both great additions to any team.**

The city was not tourist oriented and little time was spent exploring on foot. We utilized a Toyota minibus and a great driver named "Jose" kept us on the straight and narrow.

Time for relaxation over, our suitcases laden with medical supplies were loaded into two minibuses on Sunday afternoon. A 4-hour journey through tightly winding mountain roads brought the team safely to Jalapa City, on the east side of the country.

The Hotel Puente Viejo served as the base of operations for 5 days as the TEVA group prepared to provide veterinary care for an expected 600 horses in the area. The hotel was clean and provided a local fare restaurant.

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## Equitarian Initiative

***February 25, 2013***

The TEVA team worked hard to wrangle 104 Guatemalan equines for vaccinations and deworming with dental floats and hoof care for those in need. There were two separate work sites in a small local village of San Pedro Pinula with about 50 equines each. We were joined by Guatemalan veterinarians Drs. Jaqui and Estuardo, both great additions to any team.



**Campesinos patiently waited to be checked in to our first day's workshop.**

Chris Brasmer, DVM, our translator and "El Jefe", briefed the owners on what to expect as each equine was marked with a number on their shoulder using common livestock paint.

Chris maintained order with the locals and built their trust through good communication. The mouths and hooves were inspected and a different colored mark was applied if other treatments were necessary.

Between morning and afternoon sessions the group members rotated between deworming, vaccinating patient intake, farriery and floating teeth.

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**Dr. Tammy Vretis poses with a favorite patient in the dental stall.**



**Dr. Chris Brasmer, our linguist and El Jefe.**



**Ed Strickland of MWI assists Dr. Kent Arnold with a dental examination. Capps battery powered Makita equipment was purchased specifically for the trip by TEVA in September of 2012 and allows volunteers to work on the mouths of over 50 head a day, a job impossible to do with hand floats.**

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**Dr. Tammy Vretis brings down her SwissFloat and has been instrumental in sharing advanced dentistry knowledge with local veterinarians such as Dr. Estuardo.**

Body condition scores were low, three's at best with most in a near starving condition. It was field triage and the older and thinner the beast the greater its need for dentistry. Many of the equines had ear ticks, especially at the second work site.

A local preparation of Fipronil was applied topically in the ears and on the back.



**"Garrapatas" or ear ticks were very prevalent in the area.**

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## Equitarian Initiative

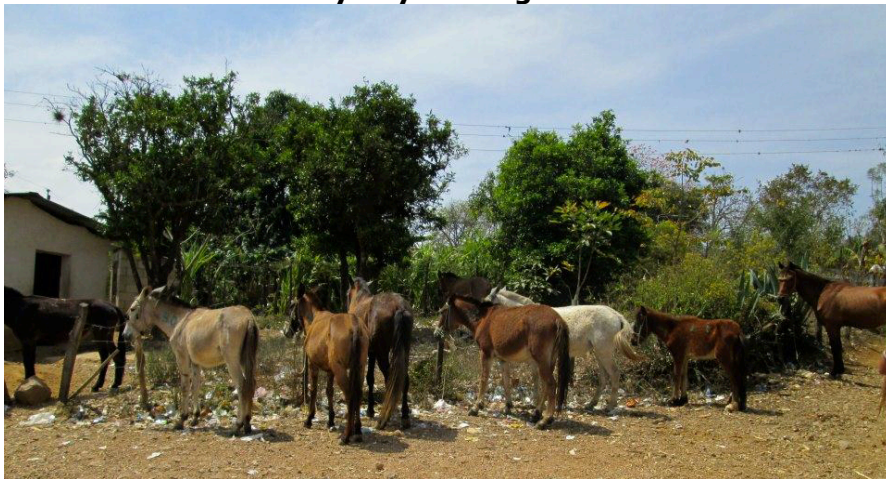
In the morning, Kristie and Laurie worked with children at a local grade school in San Pedro Pinula. In the afternoon they met back up with the equine group to work at the site. They handed out coloring books on equine care, taught lessons on bullying and performed many crafts with the kids. Kristie and Laurie had their hands full as nearly seventy children crowded around the tent to color and make bead necklaces and other crafts.

### ***February 26, 2013***

We met early for breakfast at the hotel and set out to a remote puebla down a long dirt road. En route, we dropped Laurie and Kristi off at the municipal building in San Pedro Pinula as the locals had scheduled them to visit several schools that morning.



**Laurie and Kristi had a busy day visiting schools in San Pedro Pinula.**



**Working Equids, Mules and donkeys, lined the rocky space that was to serve as our second workshop location.**

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**Dr. Tammy Vretis makes friends with the locals.**



**This is Dr. Arnold's dental workstation under a tree in the church courtyard.**

We could immediately tell the town was poor at first entry.

We met in a rocky clearing near the schoolhouse, where we encountered mule after mule tied along the fences.

Dr. Kent Arnold set up the dental station in the courtyard of the local church, utilizing a low branch as a means to suspend sedated patients.

Kent, Tammy & Kim remained busy taking turns floating teeth and working with local veterinarians Jaqui and Estuardo.

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Shoes, if applied by locals, would be left on until they literally fell off, leading to abnormal weight bearing surfaces and contracture of the hoof capsule.

We made short work of about 80 head on this particular day. Parasitism and dental problems were the main disorders in this and other areas. The owners complained of occasional encephalitis, tetanus and respiratory infections (suspected to be influenza), though the main problem they were concerned about was colic. Reducing parasite loads, vaccinating and improving mastication are expected to benefit the animals seen here.

Laurie and Kristi met the group for lunch where the local mayor joined us in a small restaurant.



**Scott Fleming, vet student and AFA farrier, began some corrective and routine trimming while working with local Guatemalan farrier, Macabeo.**



**Laurie and Kristi met the group for lunch where the local mayor joined us in a small restaurant. Seated left to right - Dr. Jaqui, Dr. Estuardo and the Mayor.**

The Guatemalan people, like most Latin Countries, are quite formal with such gatherings as typified by lots of handshakes, standing, gracious proclamations and authoritative announcements (and certificates as we were later to discover).

The sense of gratitude was obvious and our spirits were filled along with our bellies during the ceremonious lunch.

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We finished the day with a tour of a very old (1552) church located in a small village down another dirt road. The local caretaker pedaled off on his bike to retrieve the keys to give us a personal tour. It was spectacular.



**Church built by the Conquistadors in 1552. Improvements have occurred but this is one of the oldest known churches in the Americas.**

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***February 27, 2013***

Jaqui and Carlos had scheduled us a light day, figuring to finish up early on this, the third day of our mission. We worked on the edge of Jalapa only about 5 minutes away. Our supplies were packed in a few pickups as the crew jumped into Indian made "Tuk Tuks" and raced, literally, over to the work site. Tuk Tuks are auto rickshaws common in many third world countries.

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When we arrived, locals had installed a couple of large shade tents inside a panel built corral. The shade was great but we had to take control of our corral. Unbroke yearlings were too often herded into and roped in the corral, all while we were attempting to trim feet, castrate colts, float teeth and examine horses, quite a rodeo to say the least. The funny thing is that the wilder it got, the more our clients laughed and enjoyed the scene.



**Tents within the corral served as our workstation.  
Kim recovers a castrated horse as Carlos, in the white shirt, looks on.**



**Kim and Tammy gave Ed and Scott (below) a run for their money in the Tuk Tuk races.**

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The day was finished after treating 75 head. We then made out for a quick lunch, stopping to treat a few patients that were en route to our work site along the way. We ended up having to return to the site for another dozen horses that showed up and waited patiently for us after lunch.

The evening presented an opportunity for us to work with local veterinarians to teach local agricultural students and local farmers about colic and dentistry. It was here that we could see that our mission wasn't to treat a single horse, but to educate veterinarians and to underscore the value of veterinary medicine to locals so that so many more horses could be treated. The somewhat formal meeting of approximately 50 persons ended with the now standard handshakes and diplomas that are ceremoniously given out at such venues. We also took time to provide veterinarians with TEVA donated stomach tubes, pumps and various supplies to make their jobs easier. We also resolved to provide them with good dental equipment to make the provision of the dental care we were teaching, available year round.

### *February 28, 2013*

A long dirt road led us to a large soccer field in a mountainous village where 180 horses, mules and donkeys were waiting on us. This day turned to be one of the most challenging largely due to the rank behavior of the animals. I think we were all bit, struck or kicked in some capacity by these brutes and it made the going quite slow. We used the last of our vaccine on these horses that were all in very poor shape. The clients appreciated us administering the dewormer and a dose of Vitamin B complex, regardless if vaccines were available. Scott and Macabeo remained busy trimming horses and removing old, grown in shoes.



**Over 180 head were seen on Day 4 by the small veterinary team.**

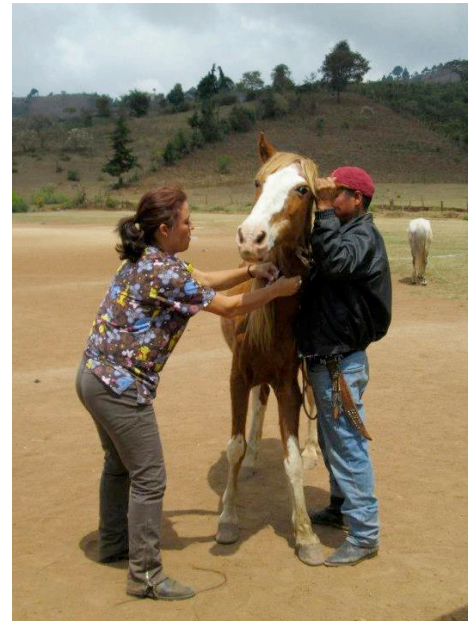
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**Ed Strickland fell into the work with ease as he ensured all of the beasts were properly dewormed.**

Ed made quick friends with the older members of the community, who were all very thankful for our presence.



**Tammy & Kim worked diligently with the local veterinarians to remove fractured teeth, correct waves, hooks and overgrowths.**

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**El Jefe used tricks learned while working with wild horses on the Reservation to quickly administer vaccine to fractious horses. This patient had just pawed its owner on the top of the head. His wounds were being cleaned by Laurie & Kristi at the time.**



**Scott and Macabeo developed a strong friendship as they worked hand in hand to get good farrier work done for the campesinos.**

The day ended and we retired to our hotel nearly completely worn out, expecting an equal day in the morning.

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**A compulsory cerveza Gallo was obtained at a local tienda to numb the day's pain.**

We were asked to have a final dinner with our local hosts at a tilapia farm nearby and so, after a quick shower, we escaped again for a lovely meal and a chance to fortify friendships.



**Big, tired smiles were noted from all corners of the table.**

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***March 1, 2013***

We traveled to our farrier friend Macabeo's hometown of Los Cerritos de Sensare on Friday and were met with a good setup right on the cobble streets of a small village. It turns out our clinic was operating on Macabeo's front door step. A workshop for processing yucca roots next door served as Dr. Kent's dental station while Laurie and Kristi quickly began their outreach to the many children.



**Horses and mules lined both sides of the narrow streets as far as we could see and up and down intersecting roads.**

We got to work getting them numbered and started the process of assessing their needs by having them come into our station one-at-a-time. This actually worked well as many were rank and required Ed and Scott to do some 'whispering' to get them properly inspected and dewormed. Ticks were plentiful as were bad mouths. All received a vitamin shot, which carries significant gravity with the locals. We retired inside at 1 pm for a home cooked soup meal by Macabeo's mother with 132 treated equids on the register.

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## Equitarian Initiative

We ended the day 5 hours later after treating 178 of the working equids. With another certificate of gratitude given and many warm 'so-longs, we packed up and headed back to camp.

### **Completion:**

At this time we could all just barely lift our supplies back onto the minibus for our final ride back to Antigua. We were exhausted. Where our efforts were left in the mountains of Jalapa, our hearts were also filled up. We all silently reflected on the fact we hadn't worked so hard over the course of a single week since throwing hay in August during high school - not a single thought crossed the minds of any participant about all the work and nothing to show for it. We had received the gift of giving and it was all we needed to wake up with a smile the next day.

I'd like to say a special thanks to:

**Texas Equine Veterinary Association** – For the purchase of miscellaneous vitamins and consumables, stomach pumps and tubes for donating to local veterinarians and in-country travel via minibus.

- **MWI** – For the donation of white goods, organization of other manufacturer donations, and donation of hats.
- **Boehringer Ingelheim** – For the donation of vaccine and Prascend hats.
- **Pfizer (Zoetis)** – For the donation of Vaccine, Excede & Dormosedan.
- **Precision Pharmacy** – For the donation of dewormer and sedation.
- **AAEVT** – For the donation of soccer balls.
- **Butler Schein** – For the donation of paste dewormer.

Also thanks to this unbelievable team of volunteers!

- Chris Brasmer, DVM- Albuquerque, NM
- Kent Arnold, DVM- Terrell, Texas
- Tammy Vretis, DVM- Uvalde, Texas
- Kim Aeschlimann- Texas A&M 2013
- Scott Fleming- Texas A&M 2013
- Ed Strickland- MWI, Lampasas, Texas
- Kristi Strickland- Lampasas, Texas
- Laurie Franklin- Weatherford, Texas

*Be Good & Do Good,  
Rob Franklin, DVM*

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