



### **Equine Medical Center Embracing Organizational Development Activities**

Organizational development activities designed to improve communications, teamwork, and operating efficiency at the Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center (EMC) have been underway for the past two years and are making progress, according to center Director **Dr. Nathaniel White**.

Under the guidance of the Equine Medical Center Council, EMC leaders began working two years ago with the Sonoma Institute, a strategic human resources consulting firm with offices in Washington, D.C., and Berkeley and Sonoma, Calif., that works with corporations like IBM, Apple, and others.

Initially, 15 people, including department heads, took part in the process, which involves periodic workshops, exercises, and meetings designed to enhance organizational performance through improved communication and developing employee trust, cooperation, and commitment to organizational goals, White said. Sixty employees are now involved with the process.

"It is working," noted White, who has also reorganized some processes associated with fiscal management and clinical services to improve operations as part of the program. He said the center's operating revenues are up and there are anecdotal signs of improved employee job satisfaction and performance.

As part of another process supported by the Equine Medical Center Council, Louisville, Ky., marketing firm Stewart and Associates has been retained to develop strategies for developing the center's brand identity in the marketplace.

That process is being undertaken in consultation with Virginia Tech's Office of University Relations, which has been working for almost a year with the EMG group on a university-wide brand development and integrated marketing initiative.



### **Kaur's NSF African Research Continues**

A National Science Foundation-sponsored research project in Tanzania being conducted by university veterinarian and director of laboratory animal resources **Dr. Taranjit Kaur** continues to examine how tourism is affecting wildlife.

Some of the work was featured during a recent telecast of "Wild Chronicles," a National Geographic-produced television show that airs on the Public Broadcasting System.

**Jason Swenson**, a Virginia Tech undergraduate student working on Kaur's project was in Tanzania during the summer of 2005 when the show's producers came through. Their visit coincided with a mysterious outbreak of an upper respiratory disease affecting some of the estimated 700 chimpanzees that inhabit Tanzania's Mahale Mountain National Park.

Only about 60 of the highly endangered chimpanzees are habituated and tolerate scientific observation, Kaur said. About 20-25 of the endangered animals were affected by the disease, Kaur said, and two infants perished. One mother carried her infant for three days, unable to accept the baby's death.

A veterinarian on site harvested tissues and Kaur coordinated their submission to the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta for pathological examination. At press time, it is not known whether or not the infectious disease affecting the chimpanzees can affect people as well.

Because of genetic similarities between chimps and people, both are highly susceptible to influenza, tuberculosis and several other infectious diseases.

Kaur's \$726,476 grant, entitled "Bridging the Gaps Using Bush-to-Base Bioinformatics, Geographic Information Systems," and a program called "READ-IT" seek to develop a holistic system for the integration of technology, research, and education as part of an overarching effort to study and protect chimpanzees.

She is helping the Tanzanian National Parks develop science-based management strategies that will protect the free-ranging chimpanzee population from tourism-related problems like disease transmission, habitat destruction, and competition for resources.

"One of the things we have learned from this is that we cannot do high-tech science under low-tech field conditions," said Kaur.

She is working with Tech's College of Architecture and Urban Studies and Christiansburg firm Solar Connexion to create a state-of-the-art field research station where solar energy will be harvested, enabling the research team to operate a modest, but ecologically friendly diagnostic laboratory on the premises.