



By Carolyn Lee The Imperial Republican

Veterinarian Lex Thompson is retiring from Veterinary Services, but he's not leaving the job he loves. He'll still be taking care of animals, just in a different way.

As of June 1 Thompson will be a technical services veterinarian in the bovine division for Newport Labs of Worthington, Minn.

The 65-year old will represent the company with its sales force, answer questions and troubleshoot for the company, which manufactures custom-made vaccines.

Custom-made vaccines are not commercial vaccines, which are made by major pharmaceutical companies and are available to the general public.

Custom-made vaccines are those made for a specific problem in a specific region that fix what a commercial vaccine can't.

Thompson said, for example, there's a commercial vaccine for pinkeye in cattle.

Pinkeye in bovines can injure an eye or even cause blindness.

Becoming interested in this problem, the bovine specialist collected samples from cattle in the early stages of pinkeye and gave them to a company which grew the cultures until it developed a vaccine based on the isolates he'd provided.

In a way, that led him to Newport Labs. "I like their approach to this particular process, and I like the people," he explained. "I really like solving problems."

Thompson also really likes his "patients." Patients are the cattle, horses, dogs, cats and more he's served over the years at Veterinary Services and other clinics. And there are the "clients." Don't call them owners around Thompson. He said a person doesn't really own a cat or a dog.

Years ago, when he first began practicing, Thompson said people might have had house dogs, but they weren't family like they are now. Large animal care has also changed, as economics have changed and bigger operations mean more complex problems.

Thompson, who grew up on a farm near Grant, didn't start out to become a vet. However, he was interested in helping people.

After a tour in the military following high school graduation in 1967, he received a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree from Texas A&M in 1978.

He was hired by Stanley Schroeder to work at Stanbar Veterinary Clinic in Imperial and also worked at Veterinary Services in Grant and in a clinic in Texas.

He and partner Dave Johnsen opened Veterinary Services on Highway 61 in 1988, where Thompson was able to continue to help his clients in both Chase and Perkins Counties.

Helping people

Being a vet is like a triangle, Thompson said. There's the vet, the client and the patient.

"If you call me at midnight I'll come because I can help you" as well as the patient, he explained.

As a vet, he may have to address several different emotions felt by the clients in the operating

room. Members of a family may be experiencing anger, worrying about payment or just wanting the patient to be cured immediately.

The patient doesn't talk, but Thompson has learned to ask the client the right questions and assess the patient that way.

Sometimes it takes awhile. A husband and wife may have different ideas about their cat's weight loss.

After many questions, it turns out the cat doesn't like its food. So, it's time to try something else.

Being a vet means you can get hurt. Thompson said, "Oh, yeah, but nothing career-ending" about injuries.

There are tragic moments, such as a patient running into a road and getting hit.

There are comic moments, such as when he had to make a house call to a cat whose head was stuck in a jar. The jar broke and the rim still encircled the cat's neck.

A little sedation and the problem was solved.

Once, not in Imperial, Thompson sent the wrong cat home with a client. The client turned the cat loose.

"Why did you do that?" Thompson asked them. "We knew it wasn't our cat," they said.

"Why didn't you bring it back?" he asked.

The cat was holed up in an abandoned house, and Thompson found it and returned it to the proper owner.

Thompson and wife, Jodi, plan to remain in Imperial. He can work for Newport Labs from anywhere, with a laptop and a cell phone, he said.

He feels that he's leaving Veterinary Services in good hands. Besides Johnsen, veterinarians Troy Worth and Darcy Moreland work with all types of patients.

In addition, Thompson appreciates the clients and patients in Chase County and beyond its borders. He just wants to help people.