

Fostering 'Animal



PHOTO COURTESY ANIMAL CONNECTIONS

Mobile exhibit showcases important role of animals — and veterinarians — in our world.

Story & photos by **Kindra Gordon**, field editor

“Everything we do in our everyday life is somehow impacted one way or the other by animals,” points out Ron DeHaven, who serves as executive vice president of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA).

With the majority of our population living in urban and suburban areas, many people are only aware of their connection with animals as pets, acknowledges DeHaven, but a traveling exhibit titled “Animal Connections: Our Journey Together” aims to raise awareness for the important role animals have not only in the home, but also on the farm, at the zoo and in the wild. It also

showcases the role veterinarians have in caring for animals.

The custom-built Animal Connections exhibition is housed on an 18-wheeler truck that expands to 1,000 square feet featuring interactive learning stations, touch screens, videos and three-dimensional displays for hands-on participation. There are five main sections within the exhibit featuring animals: The Home, The Farm, The Zoo, The Wild and The Veterinary Clinic.

The unique exhibit was created in 2013 by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) to mark the 150th anniversary of the AVMA. It was made possible through the generous support of founding sponsor Zoetis Inc. and the American Veterinary Medical Foundation.

The exhibit launched a national tour in

July 2013, starting in Chicago, and then moving to stops in New York City; Newark, N.J.; Morristown, N.J.; and Washington, D.C. In January, February and March 2014, the exhibit made stops in Atlanta, Ga.; Nashville, Tenn.; Dallas, Texas; College Station, Texas; Baton Rouge, La.; and Raleigh, N.C.; with additional stops in Portland, Ore.; Denver, Colo.; and Des Moines, Iowa. More stops were to be added throughout the year.

Sparking conversations

Myriam Springuel, interim director of SITES, explained in a press statement that the

► **Above:** A custom-built 18-wheeler is home to the Animal Connections exhibition. The mobile showcase made its debut in July 2013 in Chicago in conjunction with the 150th anniversary of the American Veterinary Medical Association.



Connections'



► **Above and right:** People of all ages enjoyed the interactive Animal Connections trailer that was included as part of the NCBA Trade Show hosted at the 2014 Cattle Industry Convention in Nashville, Tenn. Learning stations allowed participants to learn about animals and how veterinarians care for them. One activity even allowed participants to take a quiz to find out which pet would be the best match for them.

Smithsonian's interest in the project stemmed from "the affection that people everywhere have for animals." She added that Smithsonian staff felt an exhibit about veterinary medicine would "inspire lively conversations about the human-animal bond."

Christine Jenkins, chief veterinary medical officer in the United States for Zoetis, says they hope the exhibit will help inform and educate the public about the world of veterinary medicine and the shared responsibility we all have for animals' health and well-being. They also hope to provide a means to inspire young people to pursue careers in veterinary medicine and its allied professions.

For example, a virtual clinic at the center of the exhibit allows visitors the opportunity to play veterinarian. Through touch screens, they can examine and diagnose what ails their virtual patients — a dog, a piglet and a cheetah. Another display in the farm section

highlights the variety of tools stocked in the mobile clinics that large-animal veterinarians use to ensure they are prepared for any procedure.

DeHaven adds that ultimately the objective of the exhibition is to emphasize the connection between animals and people. He adds, "This really highlights the role of veterinarians in caring for those animals, and in doing so, also taking care of people."

Visitors to "Animal Connections" can continue the learning experience online at <http://animalconnections.com>. The site includes resources on animal care and careers in veterinary medicine. It also includes a calendar listing the upcoming locations and dates where the exhibit will be in the coming months. You can follow the tour on Facebook and Twitter as well.



Editor's Note: Kindra Gordon is a freelancer and cattlewoman from Whitewood, S.D.

