Dr. Jake Wells
Veterinarian of the Year

BY ANNE CHRISTENSEN

Dr. Jake Wells looks more like a cowboy than a veterinarian, and that’s no accident – he junior-rodeoed in high school, until he had to get rid of his horses before heading off to college at Texas A&M. But almost before the ink on his D.V.M. diploma was dry, Wells headed back into the world of rodeo, and his 36 years of contributions to the San Antonio (Texas) Stock Show and Rodeo have been recognized with the 2012 Pfizer PRCA Veterinarian of the Year Award, presented by Purina.

Q. What’s the most important thing you do to ensure the health and safety of the livestock at the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo?
A. Be there. Most of the job is taking care of the little things so they don’t turn into big things – doing health checks at the gate, dealing with the day-to-day needs of the animals, training the volunteers on what to look for. The PRCA rodeo is the diamond in our San Antonio Stock Show ring, but we also have a huge livestock show and a horse show at the same time, with about 25,000 animals over the 16 days – anything from turkeys to llamas – and up to 7,000 at any one time.

Q. You developed a 24/7 vet clinic on rodeo grounds – what kinds of ailments do you see there?
A. The vast majority of the issues we see are minor – mostly sniffles. We often see some colicky horses, maybe some scrapes and cuts or scratched corneas on the timed-event horses. Some contestants know we have a vet hospital on the grounds, so they call ahead to schedule routine work like joint evaluations and dental work. They are always receptive to learning how to prevent problems. These animals are their livelihood, and they have an emotional attachment to them – they spend nearly every day of the year with them.

Q. What about the roughstock – what kinds of problems are they susceptible to?
A. Those roughstock horses and bucking bulls are tough as nails – they hardly ever have any problems. Bucking horses have a little draft horse in them, so they have huge bones, stout musculature, big feet, strong ligaments – there’s a tremendous difference in the physical make-up of those horses, plus they are kept in pastures, not in stalls. The stock contractors have to think about managing masses – one horse with a sniffly nose is a problem, but a whole herd of calves with the sniffles is a disaster. The contestants mostly want a fair and level playing field – if they see an animal that’s not quite right, they’ll point it out immediately to an official, whether the disadvantage is to themselves or another competitor.

Q. You even built a pasture facility for the roughstock that compete at San Antonio, right? What’s that like?
A. We built a separate 100-acre facility about four miles outside of town and subdivided it into big grass pastures, with nice big water troughs. The animals can roam around, stretch out … we think having a little time to behave like the plains animals they are helps them rest up and compete better. You don’t win Indoor Rodeo of the Year seven times in a row without doing something right, and we feel like this is part of it.

Dr. Wells has volunteered for the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo since 1976 and has served on the rodeo’s board of directors since 1986. He was named the 2012 Pfizer PRCA Veterinarian of the Year for his work on behalf of the livestock, saddle horses and other animals at the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo.

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Dr. Wells has volunteered for the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo since 1976 and has served on the PRCA’s Veterinary Advisory Committee. He developed a veterinary school scholarship program connected to the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo, and spearheaded the production of a video about livestock care there. Dr. Wells also operates an equine veterinary clinic in Cibolo, Texas.