



CLINIC CHAMPIONS

The Sky's the Limit

Eli Olind's career path in rural Montana led him to become a leader in advocating for the profession.

Meadow Creek Veterinary Clinic, McAllister, Montana



Eli Olind, LVT, knows what it's like to take on a challenge alone. Olind started his career working for a rodeo stock contractor in Wyoming, with the responsibility of monitoring 500 head of bucking horses on about 50 000 acres of land. He would wake up well before dawn each morning and begin his daily routine, knowing that the closest veterinarian was located about 50 miles away.



“If he was busy and couldn’t come out, he would just talk me through what he would like me to do,” Olind said. “If it was not major, then I could handle it on my own.”

He went on to return to his home state of Montana and work in a rural, mixed animal practice. There, Olind’s clinic saw “everything from pocket pets up to equine surgery.

“In one day, I could go from running anesthesia on a mass removal on a mouse, to going back and running anesthesia on a pastern arthrodesis on a horse,” he said.

Growing up where competing in rodeo is “part of the way of life” (he favored the calf rope and team rope events), Olind had a love for animals but no clear direction on what he wanted to do.

He found his way to veterinary medicine after meeting with faculty at Eastern Wyoming College who made an impression on him as “straight-to-the-point, no-BS type people.” Now, 15 years into his career, Olind works at a mixed animal practice in McAllister, Montana, home to a population of 278 people, a post office, and that’s about it.

“We used to have a steak house *and* a post office, but now it’s just a post office because the bar burned down. It’s a big town, let me tell you,” he joked.

A COMPETITOR AT HEART

Below: Eli Olind grew up competing in rodeo. Opposite: Olind works on a dental case alongside Dr. Jennifer Cashman.



2025 TODAY'S VETERINARY NURSE CLINIC CHAMPIONS

Today's Veterinary Nurse aims to shine a light on inspiring stories with its Clinic Champions series. Each issue, TVN will honor a veterinary nurse for their contributions in community service, scholarship, advocacy, or innovation. This series will highlight unsung heroes who make a lasting impact on their patients and community.

At the end of the year, 1 of the 4 honorees will be recognized as the Clinic Champion of the Year.



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This environment ingrained in Olind a sense of independence, the ability to trust his instincts, and a passion for promoting the necessity of licensed veterinary technicians (LVTs). But the experience of working in physical isolation also drove Olind closer to his peers. In 2013, he became involved with the Big Sky Veterinary Technician Association (BSVTA) as it was on the verge of collapse. “A group of us volunteered to rebuild the board—and that turned into an 11-year adventure,” he said.

That adventure included a 7-year fight to pass legislation in Montana for the licensure of veterinary technicians under the Montana State Veterinary Board and build a scope of practice for LVTs. He is also the president of the American Association of Equine Veterinary Technicians.

We spoke with Olind about the lessons learned from his career in veterinary medicine, the perks of working in a rural practice, and the importance of leaning on your network when facing challenges.

TODAY'S VETERINARY NURSE: What are some of the skills that you learned while competing in rodeo and how did those translate into your career?

ELI OLIND: Being able to read animals. When you're competing and working alongside your horse while you're roping cows, you have to be able to read to make



sure: Is your horse feeling ready to compete? What's your horse telling you in the warm-up pen? Watching the cattle in the pen when they're loading them in the chute, seeing how your calf's acting. Is he pretty feisty trying to take everybody out when they're trying to get him up the alleyway? Or is he more on the docile side?

TVN: What did you learn from being thrust into independence at an early stage in your career?

OLIND: Trust your gut. Our gut tells us a lot. Especially when you think back and rely on your education, you learn to think through the process. Make sure you do your physical exam from head to toe. Don't take any shortcuts. Don't cut corners trying to make it go quicker. It's so important to look at the entire picture and really tap into your powers of observation.

TVN: Do you have any advice for people who may be wanting to work on their independence or confidence in practice?

OLIND: Network with your fellow technicians and talk about different techniques on doing things. I've learned a lot through the networks I've gained by serving on state associations and nationally. If I'm having a hard time with a certain case and I am by myself because my doctor is busy working on an emergency, I don't hesitate to call one of my friends up on the phone and say, "Hey, can I pick your brain real fast?" And never be afraid to crack a textbook. I see a lot of people panic, and they forget that we have a lot of resources right at our fingertips. A lot of people do it on their phone now, but sometimes you just crack open a good old textbook and flip a couple pages and look at the pictures. That can help a lot.

GREAT AND SMALL
Eli Olind, shown below with an equine patient, gained experience with a wide range of species in mixed animal practice.



Advocacy Success Story

On April 29, 2021, Montana Governor Greg Gianforte signed Senate Bill 106 into law, marking a victory for Eli Olind and the group of veterinary technicians who had been advocating for the legislation for 7 years. The bill, which went into effect in 2023, accomplished the following:

- Created a license and set qualification for veterinary technicians in the state under the Montana Board of Veterinary Medicine (MBVM)
- Established a penalty for those falsely claiming the title of veterinary technician
- Added a veterinary technician to the board of the MBVM
- Established a scope of practice for veterinary technicians in Montana

TVN: What was it like to work with legislation and eventually help pass licensure for veterinary technicians in Montana?

OLIND: It was very relieving once we finally got a bill passed and everything signed into law. But it took 7 years of going through legislation to get that bill passed, and it was an experience where you really have to tap in and question your resolve on how bad you really want something, because it can be extremely draining. But one of the best feelings is when your biggest opponents become your biggest supporters behind a bill, because we had some veterinarians that were dead set against us in the very beginning, and we just kept showing up, never went away. We were always open for conversations and compromise on things. And some of those veterinarians who were dead set saying that we were going to ruin vet med in Montana actually became our biggest supporters, pushing the bill through, because they finally started seeing the value of credentialed technicians and having a scope of practice for us and how much we could help grow their practices.

TVN: What was your best recipe for success in converting people to see your value?

OLIND: We just kept showing up. That's pretty much what we did. We hosted regional meetings all around the state, and we would show up, even if people were kind of nasty the first time. Every few months, we'd host another meeting, and we would be sure to not get nasty or derogatory back toward them. It was always

being open to what they were saying and then working on it. It is very draining and challenging, but it's definitely possible, and it needs to be done in more states. I know a lot of groups are trying, but we'll get there.

TVN: How would you best describe the access to veterinary care for some people in your area?

OLIND: We're the only clinic in a 50-mile radius. Since we do have a scope of practice for technicians, there are some situations where if we get a call and my doctor's in surgery, an assistant can take over running anesthesia, and I can gather supplies and go out and triage a large animal emergency if needed, and then my doctor can come follow up. I know a lot of people are talking about the shortages in large animal and rural medicine, and I think the easiest way that we could fix that is make sure your states get credentialing and then build the scope of practice for technicians and in schools. It seems large animal gets skipped over and gets the short stick a lot of times. And I think we really need to tap in to start showing the benefits of large animal practice and the joy you can have being a large animal technician.

TVN: What would you tell someone on the fence about where they want to go in their career?

OLIND: I talk a lot about the sense of accomplishment you feel working in mixed animal, rural practice, because we don't have a lot of the high-end, fancy equipment at our disposal here. We work with what we have. We figure out how to make things work best for the owner and the patient, and provide the highest level of care that we possibly can. Sometimes we don't have the option of being able to refer off to specialists. It's also in those scenarios you build a network of different board-certified vets and friends all over the place that you can call and bounce ideas off each other. But rural medicine is a different ball game. It's a different lifestyle in a lot of ways, because we don't have the ability to just say, "Oh, let's ship them off to an emergency practice," because for some of us, an emergency clinic could be 3 to 4 hours away. Luckily at my current practice I don't have to do on-call shifts very often. I still do occasionally, but I've been at rural practices where I was on call 7 days a week, 24/7, pretty much. But you just tap into your inner strength and do what's best for your patients, and do a lot of education for your clients on how to triage a lot of things at home, because a lot of times it can be a while before we can get to their place. So, client education is also very important. — *By Andy Zunz* **TVN**



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TODAY'S VETERINARY NURSE

CLINIC CHAMPIONS

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