

Central Line: The AAHA Podcast

Episode Title: Lafayette Veterinary Care Center: 2022 AAHA-accredited Practice of the Year

Guests: Garrott Van Bebber, DVM, Elizabeth Van Bebber, DVM, Holly Hunt, and Kortney Ellerbe.

0:00:04.0 Katie Berlin: Hi everyone. Welcome. Thank you for stopping in.

0:00:07.6 Garrott Van Bebber: Thank you.

0:00:09.7 Katie Berlin: I'm here with some celebrities of the Connexity Conference. These are representatives of the winning Practice of the Year, that we just found out last night at the Gala. So congratulations to all of you. That's really exciting.

0:00:23.2 Garrott Van Bebber: Very exciting.

0:00:23.9 Liz Van Bebber: Thank you.

0:00:24.7 Katie Berlin: Yeah. Yeah. So with me today, I have Garrott Van Bebber, his wife Liz, and we have Holly Hunt and Kortney Ellerbe, all from the Lafayette Veterinary Care Center in Louisiana, correct?

0:00:36.8 Garrott Van Bebber: Yes, ma'am.

0:00:37.4 Katie Berlin: And you guys are the four representatives here today. How did you choose who was coming?

0:00:43.9 Garrott Van Bebber: Well, I hadn't been to a conference in a while, so that's kind... I got kind of voted on the island for that. And my brother lives about an hour from here, I said, "This is perfect."

0:00:54.7 Katie Berlin: Okay. Yeah.

0:00:55.4 Garrott Van Bebber: So it seemed like the right time to come and Liz has been doing some work with us at the clinic as of late. So needed some CE, kind of snowballed from the Practice of the Year thing, and I think Holly and Kortney hadn't been to conferences before, so.

0:01:10.5 Kortney Ellerbe: Yep, never been.

0:01:11.0 Katie Berlin: Nice.

0:01:11.7 Garrott Van Bebber: Yeah.

0:01:12.0 Katie Berlin: Well, this is gonna be hard to top, I mean...

0:01:14.6 Garrott Van Bebber: Yes, it is.

0:01:15.4 Kortney Ellerbe: Absolutely.

0:01:16.0 Katie Berlin: They're not gonna bring you on stage at every conference and give you a prize.

[laughter]

0:01:20.6 Katie Berlin: But...

0:01:22.5 Garrott Van Bebber: Yeah.

0:01:23.6 Katie Berlin: I know, right? When you had a... We threw you a conference for your birthday.

[chuckle]

0:01:26.5 Liz Van Bebber: Yeah. So I expect this for every birthday now.

0:01:30.5 Katie Berlin: Yeah, right.

[chuckle]

0:01:31.5 Liz Van Bebber: Yes.

0:01:31.8 Katie Berlin: Do you guys wanna just introduce yourselves and tell us a little bit more about who you are, what you do at the clinic and what your practice is like?

0:01:38.5 Garrott Van Bebber: Sure. So I'm one of the veterinarians. I think we have about 12 vets right now. Been there since 2014 and recently became one of the owners of the practice as well. So that's about it for my job title, I suppose. Liz.

0:01:56.3 Liz Van Bebber: Liz Van Bebber, Garrott's wife. I work just part-time helping out at Lafayette Veterinary Care Center and I work helping out at one of the rescues in the area as well, a couple days a week. So I do a little bit of shelter medicine as well.

0:02:14.8 Katie Berlin: Oh, that's fun.

0:02:15.8 Liz Van Bebber: So it's been fun kind of being a little bit of both, a little different type of practice each week.

0:02:25.3 Katie Berlin: Do you have one you like better than the other?

0:02:27.7 Liz Van Bebber: No, I really don't. I like each one for different reasons.

0:02:30.9 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:02:32.0 Liz Van Bebber: So, yeah, I really enjoy both of them.

0:02:33.2 Katie Berlin: It probably brings a good perspective to both.

0:02:35.1 Liz Van Bebber: It does, absolutely.

0:02:35.6 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:02:36.2 Liz Van Bebber: Yep.

0:02:37.6 Katie Berlin: And Holly?

0:02:39.6 Holly Hunt: Oh, I'm Holly, I'm a nurse or a tech. Been with the company for four and a half years, but I've been a nurse for three, so it's really exciting, I've learned a lot.

0:02:49.3 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:02:50.9 Kortney Ellerbe: I'm Kortney, I'm the Nursing Department Co-Manager. I've been there for two and a half years or so. I started on the overnight team, did some house calls with a couple of other doctors, and now I am hanging out during the day with them, so it's been a blast.

0:03:12.5 Katie Berlin: Is that a nice change?

0:03:14.0 Kortney Ellerbe: It is. I love the overnight. I really like the house calls, but doing daytime is nice too. [chuckle]

0:03:22.4 Garrott Van Bebber: When you're good at everything, it's hard to pick.

0:03:24.6 Katie Berlin: Right. Yeah. Yeah. That is a problem.

0:03:26.5 Garrott Van Bebber: It is.

[chuckle]

0:03:29.0 Katie Berlin: So you all, it seems like you have a pretty varied offering for your clients. You have house calls, you have 24-hour care. Are there special services you wanted to highlight or give a shout-out to?

0:03:43.9 Garrott Van Bebber: I mean, as of late, well, our kind of like whole perspective is, we wanna be there for anything you need for your pet. We wanna be there for that, whether it be, obviously vaccines, puppy appointments, reproduction, surgery, sick pet cases, if you need an overnight stay, if you need a blood transfusion. And then we have doggy daycare, some training, our resort staff is phenomenal. I think we can board somewhere around 300 dogs and just have a very dedicated team to that, very passionate about it.

0:04:19.3 Katie Berlin: Just that alone just makes my head explode a little bit. Just thinking about all those dogs. That's a lot of dogs.

0:04:24.7 Garrott Van Bebber: It's a huge undertaking. I mean, you have to have the right people in position to get it accomplished, paying attention to detail, not letting anything slip through the cracks. And the same thing for our grooming service as well. Just some super booked, just a big kind of cohesive family.

0:04:44.2 Katie Berlin: Everybody's busy?

0:04:44.8 Garrett Van Bebber: Yeah. And like I said, we want to be kind of a one-stop shop for everybody. So if we don't have a doctor there for a couple hours overnight, but we still answer the phone, we'll get you in the first thing in the morning. And then we do have a dedicated overnight staff that takes care of those really sick babies.

0:05:00.9 Katie Berlin: Are you guys suffering from what everybody is suffering from where you're functioning with a few fewer bodies than you wish you had? Or do you feel like you're pretty fully staffed right now?

0:05:09.9 Garrett Van Bebber: I think we're finally fully staffed.

0:05:12.5 Katie Berlin: Now everybody else listening, their heads just exploded.

[laughter]

0:05:17.1 Katie Berlin: That's awesome.

0:05:18.0 Garrett Van Bebber: To be fair, I mean, between the hurricanes that have happened in the last few years and the pandemic, we just kind of almost ran around with our head spinning and did our best not to burn our people out. We really had to implement a lot of scheduling changes and that's part of the reason we don't have an overnight doctor completely anymore. We just said, what's more valuable here? Keeping our people is more valuable, taking care of our people is more valuable, but our management office has just dug through so many applications and just tried to get the right people in the right position. I think we just have that, we just feel very, very blessed to be in the spot that we're in right now, 'cause we know what it's been like when it's been hectic. Does anybody else wanna elaborate on that? Kortney?

0:06:05.8 Kortney Ellerbe: No, I definitely I think you covered all of it. I think that being able to get the people that truly wanna be there, who wanna be there for the patients who wanna be there for each other and just coming together as a big family, is a big part of it, I think, so.

0:06:24.9 Katie Berlin: And do you both feel that, I mean, I realize that your bosses are sitting here.

[laughter]

0:06:31.9 Katie Berlin: But you guys seem like you're pretty tight-knit, do you feel like the whole team kind of comes in with that idea that the culture is family culture, everybody knows each other really well, like you have each other's backs?

0:06:47.1 Holly Hunt: I think so, and I think when we have new people hired on, we're really good about being inclusive. And a lot of us... We're a big group and a lot of us are friends outside of work too. So there's always, even if it's just like, "Oh, we had a rough week, let's go have a few drinks, and kind of unwind." Like...

0:07:04.1 Garrott Van Bebber: Or the kickball team, a volleyball team.

0:07:07.4 Katie Berlin: Yeah, really?

0:07:07.5 Garrott Van Bebber: Oh, yeah.

0:07:07.5 Holly Hunt: All kinds of things that we do outside of work together, which kind of helps bring us together and while we're at work, and so it's fun.

0:07:15.3 Katie Berlin: Yeah. I love that. Well, the theme of the conference this year is Create a Better World, and we're all trying to do that in our own way, but I've been asking our guests who come into chat for the podcast, what does that better world look like to you in veterinary medicine? So I'd like to hear that from all of you.

0:07:34.0 Garrott Van Bebber: As a veterinarian, we're... I'm a pet's advocate, I mean, and I have to remember that I do take care of owners, right? I mean, that's definitely part of our job, but I do find myself say, to kind of get back to the basics at the end of the day, "Why did I get into this?" I love pets, I love the joy that they bring to me and those around me, so I do think it starts there. AAHA is a great representation of that. Do the best that you can, create a standard, adhere to that standard. Now at the same time, my personal opinion would be through social media and the instant gratification of the world, everybody is available all the time and maybe a little too available, and I think that that's probably put a lot more stress on veterinarians' minds and their hearts than was ever intended, it's just the world we live in.

0:08:29.8 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:08:31.6 Garrott Van Bebber: So I do think, to me, creating a better world is maybe creating some healthy boundaries between pets, pet owners and staff members, and appropriate boundaries so that we can all be happy together, and then go back to doing that thing that we were designed to do, which is taking care of the animals.

0:08:52.3 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:08:53.8 Garrott Van Bebber: That would be my small opinion.

0:08:56.6 Katie Berlin: I definitely feel like for me, boundaries are part of a better world, for sure.

0:09:00.5 Garrott Van Bebber: Yeah.

0:09:00.9 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:09:01.2 Garrott Van Bebber: Well, that's good to hear.

0:09:02.2 Katie Berlin: Yeah. [chuckle], I think that's a...

0:09:04.2 Liz Van Bebber: We all agree with you too.

0:09:05.7 Katie Berlin: Yeah. [laughter] And boundaries are tough when you love what you do...

0:09:08.9 Garrett Van Bebber: That's it.

0:09:08.9 Katie Berlin: Because you're like, "Oh, no, I love it. It's fine. I can just see this one more case, and I can just answer this one more phone call, I can do this one more thing, I can stay one more hour." And then suddenly you don't love it anymore, because you've been doing it too much.

0:09:20.7 Garrett Van Bebber: Right.

0:09:21.0 Katie Berlin: Saying yes to everything.

0:09:22.3 Garrett Van Bebber: And your cell phone's glued to your hand, it just is.

0:09:25.7 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:09:26.3 Garrett Van Bebber: Almost any job. So putting the cell phone down, and I'm guilty, I promise you that.

0:09:31.9 Katie Berlin: Same.

0:09:32.1 Garrett Van Bebber: Very guilty, but I would like to do a better job personally.

0:09:36.5 Katie Berlin: Yeah. Anybody else?

0:09:39.4 Holly Hunt: I would say just being kind in general. I think we have become more aware over the last few years that everybody comes from different backgrounds, whether social, economical, ethnic, whatever.

0:09:53.0 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:09:53.6 Holly Hunt: And so just having an open mind and being understanding of everybody in any given situation at any time.

0:10:00.1 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:10:00.1 Holly Hunt: Just, I think that's a really helpful mindset to have when you're interacting with anybody and...

0:10:07.2 Katie Berlin: Absolutely. A better world doesn't have to be specific to veterinary medicine.

0:10:11.3 Holly Hunt: Right.

0:10:11.4 Katie Berlin: It's good for everyone to keep in mind. The pandemic, I think highlighted our differences as much as there's similarities, and that's not always a good thing, but yeah, it's a good one.

0:10:22.5 Kortney Ellerbe: I think getting out into the community more and...

0:10:24.6 Katie Berlin: Oh, love that.

0:10:25.3 Kortney Ellerbe: Just getting everybody more involved in not only, like you said, just veterinary medicine, but in everything. And just being able to see, like you said, where everybody's coming from and being that rock for your community, I think is a really good thing to do, to be able to get out there.

0:10:47.6 Katie Berlin: I love that answer. Yeah. No one's really talked about that so far, but I really like that because the veterinarian used to be like the community person, like the... You go to the grocery store and know everybody and like you know everybody's kid's names and stuff, and now everything's so big and there's so many vet clinics, but that doesn't mean we can't still do that.

0:11:05.6 Kortney Ellerbe: Right.

0:11:06.2 Katie Berlin: I remember going to the grocery store where I used to live when I was a vet just down the street from that grocery store, and it was like, I couldn't go to the grocery store and not talk to like six people, which sometimes I just didn't wanna do, like boundaries. Right?

0:11:20.1 Garrott Van Bebber: Right.

0:11:20.4 Kortney Ellerbe: Yeah.

0:11:20.4 Katie Berlin: But it also was kind of a fun... It felt like a small town and I really liked that. And we've sort of lost that a little bit in the industry, so love that.

0:11:29.3 Liz Van Bebber: I feel like LVC is such a big... It is big, but it's still somehow has a small feel to it, because everybody is so... They're just... They're family, so.

0:11:41.2 Garrott Van Bebber: It's a goal and it's a product of, I mean, I can't say enough about Lafayette in general.

0:11:45.4 Liz Van Bebber: That's true.

0:11:47.2 Garrott Van Bebber: Shameless quote for a great town of the south, that is very... It's a small community, everybody kind of knows everybody, and I'm not from there, that's an outsider's perspective.

0:12:02.1 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:12:03.2 Garrott Van Bebber: But it's certainly home now.

0:12:04.9 Holly Hunt: The hospitality is really big where we're from, so if you're new, you're gonna get invited by strangers to come over for meals.

0:12:14.4 Katie Berlin: Whether you like it or not.

0:12:15.6 Holly Hunt: And that [0:12:15.8] ____.

0:12:16.3 Katie Berlin: Some people are gonna try to feed you.

0:12:17.9 Holly Hunt: Yeah.

0:12:18.1 Garrett Van Bebber: Absolutely.

0:12:18.8 Holly Hunt: Unfortunately, yes, the food's good down there, so.

0:12:22.5 Katie Berlin: Yeah, I would imagine. Yeah, I've only been to Louisiana once and it was New Orleans, but I did eat really well for that short term. [laughter]

0:12:28.9 Garrett Van Bebber: Absolutely.

0:12:31.8 Katie Berlin: Louisiana definitely has faced some serious challenges, it's not a place that's free of natural disasters and I'm sure that helps bring a community together, but it's also really tough to like look down the road and think like what's coming next. Do you guys have plans around that? I'm from Pennsylvania, we don't disaster plan in Pennsylvania, we should probably, but we don't. But is that part of daily life for you?

0:13:01.4 Garrett Van Bebber: The planning aspect, it is pretty challenging, because so many people look to us to take care of things when they have kind of gone wrong, when things have gone south. Fortunately, for Lafayette, we don't want anybody to get hurt, but we've just narrowly dodged storms for whatever reason, and so the damage hasn't been too bad. We lose power for periods of time and we just kind of make it through it. Dr. Patrick, the last hurricane we had, I know he was doing surgery with the headlamp.

0:13:37.4 Katie Berlin: Oh, my gosh.

0:13:37.7 Holly Hunt: And no AC in the dark.

0:13:38.7 Garrett Van Bebber: At some point it had to be done. It's not ideal, but we have enough generators now to get things running pretty smoothly and so we've dodged the storms so far, but might no happen for forever, and certainly during hurricane season, we just went with such a long period of time without having a bad one. We even... When I was in vet school and stuff, I mean, Liz lived through Katrina, Holly did too, and that was pretty tragic, but when I moved to Baton Rouge, went through vet school and we just didn't really have much. So you kind of just... It's like anything else, if it's not right in front of your face, you just kind of forget about it, and then two years back to back. So you just sort of kind of all pens and needles during this time of the year.

0:14:26.0 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:14:27.2 Garrett Van Bebber: I'm always looking like, "What's going on in the Gulf?" Like that's people who come in and tell you.

0:14:31.0 Katie Berlin: Do you watch the weather, or do you try to ignore the weather?

0:14:33.1 Garrett Van Bebber: Everybody will tell you the weather. Everybody walks in and tells

you what the weather is. So I don't ever watch it for that reason.

0:14:41.4 Katie Berlin: Yeah, yeah. Well, I live in Colorado now, but I just moved there and it's been a really wet year in Colorado for Colorado, and despite, would be the driest year ever anywhere else, but in Colorado it's been really wet and so we didn't have to worry about fires this year so much. And so I moved there in a non-fire year and I feel so relieved 'cause it's just been so normal, but everybody there just waits. They just wait for fire season and for the air to be smokey and bad, and I'm gonna be thinking about that, I think, a lot until I get used to it. It's definitely something that people from where I lived on the East Coast just don't think about, right?

0:15:22.1 Garrott Van Bebber: Yeah.

0:15:22.4 Holly Hunt: That's way more unpredictable than hurricanes.

[laughter]

0:15:23.7 Holly Hunt: We at least have like a week's notice...

0:15:26.8 Katie Berlin: Yeah, yeah, that's true.

0:15:28.5 Holly Hunt: At that point we prepare. So that's a benefit...

0:15:30.1 Garrott Van Bebber: I mean, yeah.

0:15:30.2 Holly Hunt: But yeah, fires and tornadoes, like earthquakes.

0:15:31.8 Katie Berlin: Yeah, fires are... Yeah.

0:15:34.5 Holly Hunt: I wanna know how those practices deal with those situations 'cause that's terrifying to me.

0:15:38.3 Katie Berlin: It is very scary.

0:15:38.4 Garrott Van Bebber: Absolutely, absolutely.

0:15:38.6 Katie Berlin: Yeah, very, very scary, and unfortunately, reality now may be more than ever before, but I'm glad that you guys have so far at least come through pretty unscathed and have been able to take care of everyone. Headlamp's pretty hardcore.

0:15:53.6 Garrott Van Bebber: Yeah.

[laughter]

0:15:53.8 Katie Berlin: So you guys won the AAHA-Accredited Practice of the Year, which is pretty crazy. Like there's a lot of practices...

0:16:05.7 Garrott Van Bebber: It is wild.

0:16:05.8 Katie Berlin: And you are the winners. Were you surprised or did you think like, "Yeah, this is ours."

0:16:12.7 Holly Hunt: Both.

0:16:12.8 Garrett Van Bebber: Y'all know my... What I said.

0:16:14.7 Holly Hunt: He said it in his speech.

0:16:16.0 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:16:16.0 Garrett Van Bebber: I just said... I don't know. Once I knew we were finalist, I was like, "We're gonna win." And I'm not... I feel like a pretty humble guy in regards to that, but I just felt it in my heart, and I also said, I don't know, "Why wouldn't we win?" I don't know what could be more amazing than what we have to offer and as I said last night, it has very little to do with me. It has much more to do with these ladies and as I gave... Tried to give a couple shoutouts last night to people who have just been there. Don Odie, one of them that I did not mention, but I wish I would have, but I just...

0:17:04.6 Katie Berlin: It's your chance now.

0:17:05.3 Garrett Van Bebber: Yeah, our...

0:17:05.7 Katie Berlin: You just did.

0:17:06.6 Garrett Van Bebber: Yeah, our management team, just the faces that really turned... Showed me how to be a veterinarian, and how to try and practice a seek and serve mentality, and that's what we really try and do from the doctor's standpoint, give the nurses, lift them up and because really they're the face of your practice and they're spending more time with owners and more time with pets, and the compassion is just... It's just there. So it's their clinic. It's not mine. That is how I feel, yeah, honestly.

0:17:47.2 Katie Berlin: Yeah. And how about for you guys, like knowing that you were at a practice that other people recognize as being so good, so excellent, and also having that spirit of sort of servant leadership in your community and among each other, how does that feel?

0:18:08.3 Kortney Ellerbe: I think that we go in every day knowing and thinking that we're gonna do good and that we're gonna help every patient, every client every single time, and having this honor to be awarded Practice of the Year just makes us feel a little bit better knowing that we are doing the right thing and that we are being able to do what we need to do for those patients.

0:18:38.2 Katie Berlin: That's really well said.

0:18:39.6 Holly Hunt: I think it just validates the core values we try to live every day, which fit really well with what AAHA is about as well. So it's an honor. I didn't think I would... I never thought I would be in this kind of industry in this role at all and then I'm working at the top practices in the company. I can't believe that. I'm so shocked and I'm just sad that the whole entire rest of our practice can't be with us to celebrate right now. We really miss them and I wish they

were all here.

0:19:11.3 Garrett Van Bebbler: It was really cool that they had it on live feed. I think there was a lot of people tuning in for sure.

0:19:16.5 Katie Berlin: That's great.

0:19:17.2 Garrett Van Bebbler: And then we FaceTimed them afterwards, the staff, but...

0:19:18.6 Katie Berlin: That's awesome. It's like on British Bake Off or whatever when they call the person in the end. "Guess what? I'm star baker."

[laughter]

0:19:31.3 Katie Berlin: Yeah, but I love that and I love that at least you could bring some of your team here because it is a team sport. We like to say that. Like excellence is a team sport and so is compassion and everything that you guys do for your community, patients and clients and I'm sure that there are gonna be lots of clients who are very excited to hear about this too because even though clients maybe don't understand AAHA quite as well as a lot of the team members do, they are gonna be able to see a renewed enthusiasm on your part that definitely is gonna translate.

0:20:05.5 Garrett Van Bebbler: Absolutely.

0:20:05.9 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:20:07.4 Garrett Van Bebbler: And I think Louisiana is no stranger to competition, but they had said, "Hey, we won something and we don't need much of an excuse to celebrate." [0:20:19.5]

_____.

0:20:19.8 Katie Berlin: Yeah, that's good.

0:20:24.1 Garrett Van Bebbler: So we'll be celebrating with them.

0:20:25.0 Katie Berlin: So a little bit of party time when you get home.

0:20:25.4 Garrett Van Bebbler: Probably so.

0:20:26.2 Katie Berlin: That's good, and you guys have earned it.

0:20:28.2 Garrett Van Bebbler: Yes.

0:20:29.8 Katie Berlin: And congrats to you guys. Thank you so much for stopping in to see me and also congrats to the other finalists like that was pretty good company you all were in.

0:20:39.1 Holly Hunt: Definitely.

0:20:39.5 Garrett Van Bebbler: Oh, my gosh, absolutely.

0:20:40.7 Katie Berlin: Yeah, I have the videos from... The presentations were very inspiring.

0:20:46.5 Holly Hunt: They all were.

0:20:46.6 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:20:46.9 Holly Hunt: I was worried after watching [0:20:51.1] _____ that we weren't gonna win, I'm like, "Oh, God." That's why I was shocked.

0:20:51.1 Katie Berlin: Who wants to win if it's not against the best, right?

0:20:54.2 Garrott Van Bebber: That's right, and you kind of just get a taste of like, what's going on down the street. Like there's somebody else doing it. If you're not gonna do it the best, somebody else will.

0:21:05.6 Katie Berlin: Yeah, yeah.

0:21:05.8 Garrott Van Bebber: So you have to bring your A game every day.

0:21:07.0 Katie Berlin: Wonderful. Thank you guys so much.

0:21:10.1 Garrott Van Bebber: Thanks for having us.

0:21:10.3 Holly Hunt: Thank you.

0:21:10.5 Katie Berlin: I hope you enjoy the rest of the conference.

0:21:11.2 Garrott Van Bebber: We will. We will.

0:21:12.0 Kortney Ellerbe: Thank you.

0:21:12.3 Katie Berlin: Alright.