

VHMA MEMBER PROFILE



Debbie K. Hill, CVPM



Debbie started in the veterinary field working as a receptionist at a small animal clinic in Denver, Colorado in 1989. Good people skills and a desire to solve problems made up for the total lack of experience with animals. For the next five years, Debbie learned the basics of a veterinary clinic. After ten years in children's day care, the transition from the "cutest, smartest baby" to the "cutest, smartest pet" was pretty straight-forward.

Life changed in 1994 for Debbie. She moved back home to Pensacola, Florida and applied for an office manager position with a veterinarian with vision. The title of office manager that she brought from Denver was very different from the job she was undertaking. The job of opening a large hospital from the ground up meant taking on the responsibility for more than customer service and billing. Being a seven-day-a-week hospital, with boarding and grooming, means lots of people are needed. After three years, her position grew to Hospital Administrator for four locations, two of which she helped open from the ground up.



During these years, she sought every opportunity for continuing education. She attended the Veterinary Management Development School in Denver where she was encouraged to attend Purdue's Veterinary Management Institute. Since this a graduate course, she was unsure how qualified she would be for this type of program. The encouragement received in Denver made her consider the possibility of furthering herself in professional management. She successfully completed the VMI courses and remains a management member of AAHA, finding them an excellent resource for managers at all levels.

Attending VMI expanded her contacts and led to a job in Jacksonville, Florida when her husband was transferred. She went to work for another AAHA hospital and spent the next nine months bringing everything up to date. Upon taking this job, the owner asked that she join the Veterinary Hospital Managers Association with the goal of attaining the CVPM designation. She attended the winter VHMA retreat and was given her first exposure to the Certified Veterinary Practice Manager program. With no college education, it seemed to be beyond her. But again encouragement led her to delve deeper. The 18-hour requirement is really only six classes and the range of management courses this can cover is broad.

Upon becoming a grandparent, Debbie returned to Pensacola in 2000 and resumed her previous job as Hospital Administrator, now with six locations to manage. She continued to be a member of VHMA but without a real intent to pursue certification. Attending two to three major conferences on management each year kept the CVPM potential in front of her. After deciding to send for the application to see what exactly she might be lacking, she took a course at the local junior college to get her feet wet. Marketing 101 proved to be the turning point in her decision to pursue certification. Taking courses that are relevant to your everyday work made it much more interesting.

While her hospital went through various stages of growth, she continued the college courses and any management conferences she could find both national and local. Since it proved to be both interesting and challenging, she did not stop at the six courses and now has 30 hours in marketing, finance, human resources, business law and organization. The reading list for the CVPM in itself is a great source of much needed information and really did make a difference when she sat for the exam.

In October of 2005, Debbie sat for the CVPM exam and passed. Attending the annual meeting prior to the exam helped on several levels. She met and studied with others sharing the same goal, attended seminars that were relevant to both daily management and information needed for the exam and received lots of encouragement and good wishes that kept her spirits up under the stress. Receiving her CVPM gave Debbie the validation needed to deal with a variety of doctors and staff with their own agendas. Having been challenged in the past with "why should I have to listen to a lay person?" this was the answer she and her employer had needed.

Debbie's advice to others considering certification is that "you will be surprised at what you can do and the amount of encouragement that is out there in this field. It was worth every minute that I put into preparation. At 50, I have finally impressed my parents."