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UNH Offers New Semen Freezing Service for Horse Breeders

By [Sharon Keeler](#)
UNH News Bureau

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DURHAM, N.H. -- When Anne Whitten of Horses Unlimited in Gloucester, Mass., wanted to breed her dressage champion Pik L to a mare at her partner facility in Albuquerque, N.M., she turned to the University of New Hampshire for some help.

Whitten needed to have her stallion's semen frozen and shipped cross country, so the mare in New Mexico could be artificially inseminated. She was able to do this through a new and relatively rare service offered through UNH's Department of Animal and Nutritional Sciences.

"You can't collect semen during the riding season because it affects the horse's performance," says Whitten. "So we needed to collect off-season, and have it available when the mare was ready."

Bill Berndtson, professor of animal and nutritional sciences, and Sue Bruns, manager of the horse barns, coordinate UNH's new and successful program. Deme Erickson, DVM, from the Rochester Equine Clinic, facilitated the process between Whitten and the university.

To collect the semen, Pik L was brought to UNH's horse barns on campus, where he was encouraged to mount a "phantom," which looks like an artificial mare sans head and legs. A real mare was on site to "encourage" the stallion.

The semen was collected by Dr. Erickson into an "artificial vagina," a device with a long rubber bladder, and delivered to Berndtson in the adjoining laboratory. The sample was measured for number of sperm per milliliter and tested for motility, the sperm's swimming ability. The semen was then processed, and the sperm

frozen and stored in liquid nitrogen at -320° F for shipping.

The whole process took about four hours. And unlike refrigerated sperm, which last only 72 hours, frozen sperm remain viable indefinitely.

"It may seem more complicated than letting the horses breed naturally, but you don't have to worry about logistics, or whether the horse is in competition," Whitten says. "This service UNH offers is invaluable to the horse community."

According to Berndtson, the semen freezing center is an example of how the university successfully blends its teaching and service missions.

"The facility is a win-win situation for area breeders, students and veterinarians," says Berndtson. "There are very few facilities offering such a service to stallion owners in the U.S., and the facility at UNH helps to make this technology more accessible to breeders in our region. It generates revenue to support UNH's educational program, and provides a teaching center for our students to be trained in reproductive management and artificial insemination."

UNH offers the breeding lab services for cooled and frozen semen to area veterinarians and their clients. Arrangements for collection and semen processing is done by the veterinarian or through referral to an area veterinarian.

For more information on UNH's semen freezing services, contact Sue Bruns at 603-862-0027 or Dr. Deme Erickson at 603-534-0208.

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