

Veterinary care well in hand for equine Pan Am Games

The upcoming Pan Am Games are going to see some of the top equine athletes in the world in these parts, and they're going to have to be cared for.

Dr. Mike Pownall, of McKee-Pownall Equine Services, has been named veterinary services manager for the equestrian events at the Games.

"I coordinate all of the day-to-day veterinary activities," was the way he described his job.

Most of the teams bringing horses to the Caledon Pan Am Equestrian Park in Palgrave will have their own supply of experts, including veterinarians. Dr. Pownall and his team will supply support services to these people, as well as help for competitors that don't have their own vets.

During the Games, there will be between three and 10 veterinarians on the site, as well as technicians and veterinary students.

And all of these people, including Dr. Pownall himself, are volunteers. He said he was particularly heartened at the way people have stepped up for the Games, considering this is usually the busiest time of year for veterinarians.

Naturally, horses that make it to this level of competition are going to be in top condition, but there is always the unexpected to be worried about.

"They're in excellent shape," Dr. Pownall said, "but you never know."

It's possible for a horse to come down with something like colic, or be injured during competition. He added he and his colleagues will be able to assist with horses that are not performing well, carrying out X-rays, blood tests, etc.

While they will be ready for what develops during the Games, the less they have to do, the better.

"Our goal is we're going to be really bored," he said.

"We're dealing with highly-trained athletes," he added.

Dr. Pownall said there was no great trick in getting this job for the Games, observing he simply asked for it. He said he's been working with Equestrian Management Group, which runs the Palgrave facility, for about 10 years as an on-call veterinarian. He and his wife, Dr. Melissa McKee, volunteered their services.

McKee-Pownall Equine Services are based in Campbellville, but have offices in Caledon, Newmarket and Niagara.

"The whole company's involved," he said.

Part of the job will be to make sure each horse is checked twice a day for infectious diseases. As well, the animals will be watched as they warm up and compete.

"They are getting the premier service of attention," he said.

The busiest time will be when horses have to be transported to the Pan Am Cross-Country Centre (Will O Wind) in Mono for the cross-country competition. There will be 10 veterinarians on deck for that. In addition to transportation issues, if it's a particularly hot day, they will have to make sure the horses get the necessary fluids and electrolytes.

The work has started on getting ready for his coming tasks. He's been working on scheduling issues, as well as finding billets for the students. Dr. Pownall has already deduced where he'll be staying.

?I imagine I'll be living there (at Palgrave) from a few days beforehand until it's over,? he said.

?It's going to be exciting,? he said. ?I'm really excited that this area is hosting it.?

He says he's especially looking forward to showing that the veterinary care in Ontario is as good as anywhere in the world.

?We all just enjoy giving back to the Ontario equestrian community,? he added.

This will not be his first experience with this level of competition. He was a volunteer at the 1999 Pan Am Games held in Winnipeg.

?I think it's going to be a showcase for Ontario,? he observed.