

A look at the judging

Every December, we gather five veterinary design experts to pore over the high-quality submissions we get for the *Veterinary Economics* Hospital Design Competition and choose the best of the best for our editorial team to feature. It's really a tough job, and not that glamorous.

The judges sit quietly in a hotel boardroom in Kansas City, Mo., and each one independently evaluates every submission, reading every word, thinking through every detail of the site plans and floor plans, and reviewing every photograph. To keep the discussion organized, they take notes about each facility to help them remember critical details during our group discussion.

Occasionally someone asks a question about how a particular material has held up over time or what other hospitals have done to address a specific problem. And all these discussions leave me impressed by the depth of the judges' knowledge. Between them they've seen, built, designed, managed, and owned hundreds of practices.

The ever-higher quality of our submissions is also inspiring. Every year, *Veterinary Economics* Practice Management Editor Dr. Ross Clark makes the point that he'd be proud to own any of the practices he reviews for the competition. And yet, in the end, we only recognize one Hospital of the Year and 10 Merit Award winners. That means some tough discussions on Day 2 of the competition judging.

In the morning, the judges go back and look at any of the facilities that they want to see again. Then we go through the complete list of submissions, and I ask each judge whether he listed that hospital as a potential winner. If every judge says yes, that practice is a clear winner. If every judge says no, we can eliminate the practice. Most facilities get a mix of yeses, no's, and maybes. We come back to each of those, talking about the features the judges like and any potential problems as a group. In the end, the competition judges discuss and debate until they all agree on the final 11 winners.

From the pile of 11 selected entries, the judges pull their picks for the Hospital of the Year, and put them back on the table for discussion. As a group, they look at each of these hospitals again. And again, they talk about all the pros and cons of each choice until they reach agreement.

I invariably leave the event feeling proud that such smart, articulate, experienced members of the veterinary community will spend two days debating the details of design with us. They do their best to recognize the most extraordinary facilities in the veterinary profession, to give all of you the very best guidance on design issues, and to help us set the bar for practices being built today and in the years to come. I couldn't appreciate their dedication to veterinarians and investment in design issues more.

As always, the March cover story featuring the Hospital of the Year kicks off another batch of cutting-edge veterinary facilities. They're all practices we hope any doctor can learn from. And I hope you'll be as excited about the potential they represent for the veterinary profession as I am.

Marnette Falley
Editor, *Veterinary Economics*