

# It's straight from the horse's mouth

## Horse dentist trains others in tooth care

At 47, Dale Jeffrey, singer, writer, guitar player, welder, carpenter, farrier and horse trainer, is something of a "jack of all trades." But he's a master of one.

**'For every person I graduate, that's 500 more horses that get taken care of.'**

—Jeffrey

About 12 years ago, Jeffrey began working on his horses' teeth. He began out of necessity, he said, because few veterinarians at that time would do dental work on horses.

Now, Jeffrey is one of the only horse dentists in Nebraska, and the only person in the country who makes a complete line of equine dentistry tools.

Jeffrey said the mouth is probably one of the most neglected areas of equine care. Without healthy teeth, horses have trouble grinding their food, he said, which is one of the major problems of poor health.

Around 1930, Jeffrey said, much of the information on horse teeth was lost. With the growth of the mechanical age, the horse population declined, and veterinarians

stopped worrying about a horse's mouth, he said.

"People don't look at a horse's teeth because they are out of sight," Jeffrey said. "Most people don't realize that horses have back teeth."

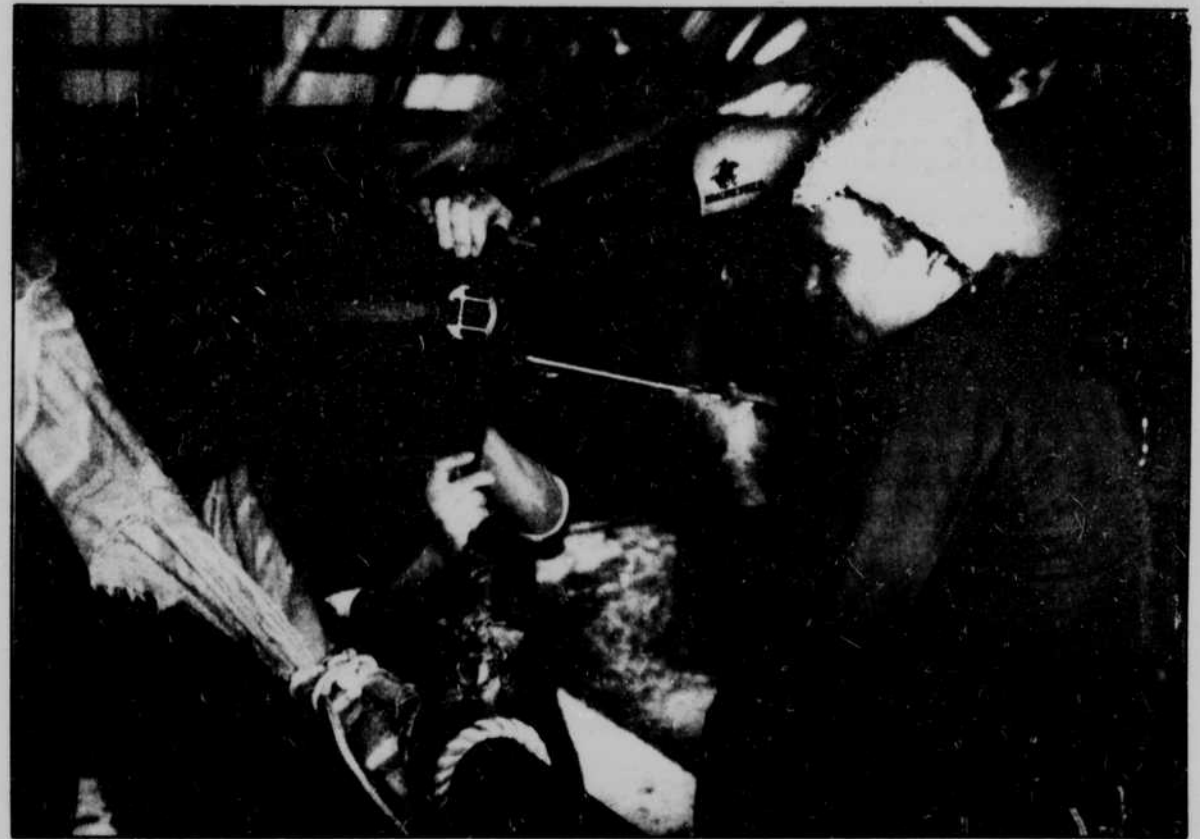
Jeffrey practiced on his own horses' teeth. He eventually got requests for dentistry throughout the Waverly area. He started teaching seminars for horse shoers, owners and trainers and began marketing his equipment.

Jeffrey, the owner of Leatherwork and Horse Tack and World Wide Equine Dental Supply, has his tools and equine books in 10 veterinary colleges in the country. His seminars have included people from West Germany, England, New Zealand, Canada and much of the United States.

Jeffrey teaches two dentistry classes a month. He starts his students out in a makeshift classroom, teaches them the problems to look for and demonstrates the work on 50 different horse skulls.

Most of the materials and tools are his own. Jeffrey has written two books on equine dentistry and makes the tools in his workshop. The skulls come from packing plants, he said. Jeffrey boils them in water, then puts them in a bag and "lets the maggots do the rest."

After the technical work is out of the way, Jeffrey puts his class to work, first demonstrating, then



coaching his students as they float and pull teeth on live horses.

Jeffrey said his students become qualified dental technicians through practice, the way he did. There is no license for equine dentistry except for technicians on the race track, but Jeffrey gives students a certificate to show that they have taken his course.

"Knowing how to take care of a horse's teeth just takes practice," Jeffrey said. "Ten years ago I could have shown you everything I knew in 30 minutes."

Veterinarians do a lot of work on horse teeth, but said most of the maintenance is left up to the owner, Jeffrey said. Many veterinarians recommend dental technicians because they don't like the dental work, he said.

Regular maintenance for equine teeth includes floating or filing teeth so sharp edges don't cut a horse's mouth, pulling wolf teeth and rolling front molars — rounding the edges — so the horse is comfortable when wearing a bit.

Farriers make up more than one-half of Jeffrey's classes. He said

horse shoers are the perfect people for the job because they already see the horse on a regular basis and are sensitive to the horse's general condition.

Jeffrey also teaches his students the boundaries of horse dentistry. He said dental technicians should be

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careful to confine their practice to the general condition of the teeth and leave any surgery up to the veterinarians.

Jeffrey said he could probably make more money if he devoted his time only to equine dentistry, but teaching is more rewarding.

"For every person I graduate, that's 500 more horses that get taken care of," Jeffrey said.

Story and Photos  
By Amy Edwards

Above: Floating molars, Jeffrey shows his students how to work on a horse without sedation. Left: Jeffrey teaches students from the United States and Canada in a makeshift classroom behind his workshop. Lower left: Jeffrey demonstrates floating back molars on a horse's skull. Below: One of Jeffrey's students carries his tools to the practice barn.

