

TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

Bathurst veterinarian to volunteer, learn during Cook Islands adventure

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Training: Ashley Babin will gain hands-on experience working in tropical destination

Next month, Ashley Babin of Bathurst will travel halfway around the world for her first hands-on experience in veterinary medicine.



Babin, a Bathurst High School graduate studying at the Atlantic Veterinary College in Charlottetown, will be volunteering on the Cook Islands in the Pacific Ocean next month.

Babin, 24, is a second-year student at the Atlantic Veterinary College in Charlottetown. The 2003 Bathurst High School graduate will spend a month in the Cook Islands between Hawaii and Tahiti as a volunteer through the Esther Honey Foundation.

"I wanted to travel a bit while getting some hands-on experience," she said. "I wanted to do some type of volunteer veterinary work."

The Esther Honey Foundation was founded by a woman who visited the Cook Islands in the southern part of the Pacific Ocean in 1993. The animal lover came to learn that there were no veterinary clinics available in that region. When Cathy Sue Ragan-Anunsen returned to her home in the United States, she gathered resources and started the non-profit organization that exists today. The foundation now

provides vet clinics and resources for the Cook Islands and surrounding area. All vets there are volunteers.

"Vets and technicians and anyone that would like to volunteer go to the island," explained Babin, the daughter of Tim and Lise Babin. "There is one building that they use for the clinic and a residence on the same site for the volunteers so you can stay there at no cost."

She said volunteers receive free accommodations, but must pay their way to get there, along with meals and other costs. She has already purchased her plane ticket and will look to bring vet supplies with her.

"I'm trying to gather supplies from local veterinarians or if people just want to donate to the actual foundation, that's what we're hoping to do," she said, noting the foundation website is www.estherhoney.org.

Babin will be accompanied to the Cook Islands by two of her classmates from the Atlantic Veterinary College. She described the experience she expects to receive as another building block to her dream of becoming a veterinarian.

"I guess I've always wanted to be a vet since I was 12. I always like the animals but I also really enjoyed science so the mix of both of them together felt like an exciting career to go into," she said, noting she is studying medicine for both small and large animals.

Babin said she has studied theory of vet medicine and she understands that the clinic where she is going won't be as high-tech as what one would expect in Canada. However, she said the procedures will be similar.

"It will be really useful because we'll get some hands-on experience and just to be able to help these types of animals"; I think it will be kind of eye-opening. We're still basically learning the theory behind a sterile operating room and scrub-in for a surgery and stuff like that. Right now, we haven't had a chance to practise that, so it will be cool to see how it can also work in other places that are not as high-tech."

She said much of the work will be focused on dogs and cats, but there will also be other animals coming through the clinic on the Cook Islands.

"A lot of it has to do with spaying and neutering all the stray dogs and cats. But there are a lot of fish poisoning cases as well and a lot of farming so there will be some larger animal cases while in the Cook Islands. I think it will be a mixture of everything."

Babin said after this volunteer work is concluded, her plan is to work at a vet clinic in Dalhousie this summer as a paid summer student.