Before she was 10, Ruth Blauwiekel remembers delivering a lamb with her dad on their small farm in central Michigan that her brother, Pete, still operates. That was the beginning of a lifelong love of animals and a career.

Today, Blauwiekel holds her PhD in veterinary medicine, a diplomat of the American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine and works as the University Veterinarian at the University of Vermont.

Dr. Blauwiekel first moved to Vermont in the late 1970s after she graduated from Michigan State University’s College of Veterinary Medicine, doing work with dairy cattle, which she came to love.

“Dairy cattle are 2,000-pound animals, but they have a nice nature,” she said with sincere assurance. “Dairy cows are generally very docile... Jersey cattle are renowned for liking people and being very friendly.”

She worked “in a ‘mixed’ veterinary practice (large and small animals) in Brattleboro for six years, working almost exclusively with dairy cattle,” she recalled, adding that’s where she met her husband, Curt Taylor, who was working on one of her client’s farms at the time.

The pair left Vermont in the early ’80s to attend graduate school, but they still returned someday. It took 20 years, however, before the right position opened up — a post at the school, but knew they would return someday. It took 20 years, but they knew they would return someday.

When that veterinarian left, she assumed his job responsibilities, and a couple of years later I was able to meet the requirements for Board Certification in Laboratory Animal Medicine."

Recently Dr. Blauwiekel elaborated on her experience as a University veterinarian for UVM.

Q: What do you do as a University veterinarian?

A: Some of my earliest memories revolve around caring for sheep and pigs. I was always interested in animals, but I think that the real impetus to enter veterinary school came because the veterinarian who worked in our community in Michigan was very enthusiastic about his work and very encouraging of my career aspirations.

As I work with students at UVM I always keep in mind the importance of mentoring and encouraging young people — they are our future, after all!

Q: What courses do you teach?

A: I teach a class in Clinical Livestock Medicine, which is very popular among UVM’s pre-veterinary students. We spend a lot of time working with the College’s cattle, so it’s a very “hands-on” learning experience. I also give guest lectures in several classes that discuss the ethical and humane use of animals as research models, some physiology classes, and a very interesting Animal Science class called “Animals in Society.”

Q: Do you have a memorable moment about your experiences as a veterinarian?

A: Some of my more memorable experiences have been working with the CREAM (Cooperative REAL Education in Agricultural Management) students at UVM. Our Animal Science department has an experiential learning program in which a group of students takes on the management and husbandry of our dairy cattle teaching herd for a year at a time. The students do all the milking and feeding of the cows, clean the barn, manage the reproduction and assist in the veterinary care. They learn a great deal about taking care of the animals, as well as about operating a farm business. Many of our students would not come from agricultural backgrounds, and it is very cool to see the look on a young person’s face when he or she first helps deliver a baby calf. Their excitement and enthusiasm is really infectious!

— Elsie Lynn

Ruth Blauwiekel, University Veterinarian at UVM, stands with a fistulated cow at the Paul Miller Research Complex in Burlington on Friday morning. OLIVER PARRIN PHOTOGRAPHY

Ruth Blauwiekel, University Veterinarian at UVM, stands in a barn at The Paul Miller Research Complex in Burlington on Friday morning.