

A Trip to Africa Gave this Student of the Year a Passion for Endangered Animals

By Heidi Dahms Foster



Student of the Year.

(Photo courtesy Margaret Chamblee.)

Prescott Valley Chamber of Commerce's 2018 Student of the Year, Margaret Chamblee, has wanted to be a veterinarian since she was four years old. But she never thought much about rhinoceroses until she traveled with a school group to a South African wildlife preserve in late May. For her, it was a life—and perhaps career changing—trip.

Chamblee joined a group from the Arizona Agribusiness & Equine High School, where she attends the Prescott Valley campus. Showing the determination she is known for, she raised the \$5,000 cost of the 10-day trip herself with help from friends and family.

The group left on May 27, and endured 27 hours of flights through Atlanta, to Amsterdam, and on to South Africa. Her first room at Ulavane Environmental Training, a school near the Amakhala Game Reserve where all field guides receive training, was rather unnerving. Her mother Donna kept friends and family up to date on the adventure, and this was her description: "Mag's first day in Africa is in the books. By the tone in her voice I couldn't tell if she

was crying or laughing. There are HUGE spiders in their rooms and the rooms are ROUGH to say the least. I think they have decided to take shifts sleeping so the spiders the size of their palms don't end up on them!"

The truly exciting part of the first day was the reason Chamblee took the trip – she saw impalas, striped donkeys, toads, baboons, and a herd of "mildly aggressive elephants."

The first part of Chamblee's trip was spent with the field guides from Ulavane, who showed them the Reserve and outlined their conservation efforts. Activities included excursions, a safari, a beach hike, and a night safari.

"We had a completely different experience than regular tourists. There are about 600 bird species, and before the field guides can be certified they have to be able to recognize each one. The guides are professional and amazingly gifted, and trained right there. That was a cool experience for me," she said.

The second half of the trip, the group moved to Woodbury Lodge near Amakhala, where the rooms were luxurious and minus the big spiders. Her mother joked that she was a little worried her daughter might not want to come home after that! During this portion of the trip, the youth worked with the veterinarian that attends Reserve animals. It was this experience that gave Chamblee a new passion and perhaps a desire to work with larger animals.

During one day, she helped the vet prepare injections, monitor respirations, and extract blood from a red hartebeest. Then she was able to work with a rhinoceros, an experience that impacted her greatly.

"It's hard to describe. Rhinos are so underappreciated. These animals are fighting for survival. They are such amazing animals to see in person, to be there, taking a heart-



AAEC group after doctoring a rhino. (Photo courtesy of Margaret Chamblee.)

beat, and see how miraculously created they are. Even though they are huge, they don't make a sound when they move because of how they are built. They have a certain type of foot that when they step their foot pads absorb all the noise," Chamblee said.

"I wish more people got this experience, because then we wouldn't be in danger of losing them. It changed my mindset a lot. I wanted to do something for animals, but I never saw myself as an advocate. Now it's all I can think about."

Now in her senior year, Chamblee is working hard to get ready for college. She has taken college classes through high school, an opportunity offered by AAEC, and has maintained a 4.0 grade average since 7th grade. She'll start classes at the University of Arizona in Fall 2019.

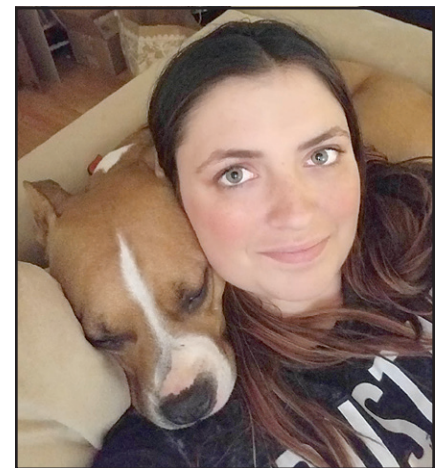
Not only has Chamblee found time to excel at both high school and college classes, she worked as the horse barn manager at AAEC



Margaret (left center) with rhino in Africa. (Photo courtesy Margaret Chamblee.)

for the past two years, caring for the school's six horses. This year, she started a new job at Safeway in Prescott Valley. Also during her high school career, Chamblee has participated in FFA on the horse judging team. The team competed at the state level, emerging in the top 10.

Chamblee attends high school from 8 a.m. to noon, after which she heads to college classes Monday through Thursday, and then to work. She's close to her family and active at her church. What's her time management secret? "You really make sure whatever you spend time on is worth it!"



Margaret Chamblee and dog Sedona. (Photo courtesy Margaret Chamblee.)

She said her faith and the support of her family and friends has been a big part of her success.

"My mom and dad help out a lot. I wouldn't be able to do it without them – they ultimately give me the keys to my success. Other than family, God has really helped me. I'm not saying I don't get stressed, but knowing my family and God are there really helps and refreshes me."

With her passion and the skills she has gained from her high school years, no doubt Chamblee will continue to excel as she enters college and completes her veterinary studies. Who knows? One day travelers to the Amakhala Game Reserve in South Africa might meet Margaret Chamblee, DVM.