

Rob Frey

Produced in conjunction with COLA

Rob Frey, Laboratory Manager, Athens Medical Laboratory, Athens, OH

As a newly minted graduate of Ohio University in Athens, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Zoology, Rob Frey was not entirely sure of where his true career aspirations lay. Enrolling as a microbiology graduate student at the University of Tennessee, he took a part-time job working in the university hospital laboratory to help defray costs, assisting with tuberculosis testing. The experience ignited his passion for laboratory bench work.

"Like most people who get into this line of work, I really enjoy solving the mysteries and puzzles that laboratory science and testing present," Frey said. "It's a very satisfying feeling to find something amiss or strange in a specimen, then work it up and present your findings--especially if it's something that's been overlooked or not considered."

Convinced he wanted to make a career out of medical laboratory technology, he returned to Ohio University to obtain his Medical Technology degree, performing his clinical rotation at Mt. Carmel Hospital in Columbus, OH. He later joined the laboratory staff of Good Samaritan Hospital in Zanesville, OH.

Family Roots

While he enjoyed working in a hospital setting, when Athens Medical Laboratory, an independent reference laboratory in his hometown, offered him a position, he jumped at the chance to return to family. The laboratory, the only reference lab in rural Southeastern Ohio, serves most of the region's physicians, nursing homes and other facilities, and handles an annual testing volume of more than 300,000. The lab also includes a remote drawing station at nearby Ohio University's College of Osteopathic Medicine.

"The major difference between working in a reference lab setting versus a hospital is you aren't dealing with critical care situations, but rather, you're working with basically healthy people who are trying to stay that way," Frey explained.

The reference lab employs six medical technologists and also eight phlebotomists, who travel to area nursing homes on a daily basis to draw patient blood samples. The lab also has been contracted since 1971 to provide oversight for Ohio University's Student Health Center laboratory, which is staffed by two technologists and a supervisor.

While most of the health center's lab tests are sent to Athens Medical Laboratory for processing, Frey and another member of his team rotate supervising all testing performed on-site at the Health Center, such as complete blood counts and pregnancy tests.

Back to the Bench

After working at the reference lab for 24 years as a Medical Technologist, Frey eventually purchased the laboratory from the owner, running it until he sold it several years ago to the local hospital. The hospital, in turn, hired him back to continue to manage the facility.

"I enjoyed owning the lab, but it took me away from the bench work I really like to concentrate on the managerial side of the business," Frey said. Today, he is back at the hands-on laboratory work he relishes, handling most of the microbiology testing and leaving the bench work to the rest of his 20-member team, most of whom he has hired over the years.

Frey finds the educational approach that COLA takes to laboratory accreditation particularly helpful in his quest to strive for continuous quality improvement in the laboratory. "When we have inspections, it's a real coaching process, in terms of emphasizing how we can keep getting better," he said. He also takes advantage of COLA's online QMS courses.

And while he concedes laboratorians--often unseen by patients and other members of the healthcare team--"don't get a lot of credit," he believes working in laboratory medicine can be extremely satisfying. "Admittedly, this isn't the easiest field academically, with many of the prerequisite courses identical to what pre-med students take," Frey said. "But in my experience, if you're up to the challenge, you can make a real difference, because so much of patient health is dependent on laboratory results."

Athens Medical Laboratory has been a COLA client since 1998.



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