



## Equestrian Student-Athlete Katie Buttolph Puts Together Passion for Medicine and Horses at Minnesota Crookston

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The daughter of two medical practitioners, [Katie Buttolph](#) never thought she would want to go down a similar career path as her father, a pathologist, and her mother, an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) Nurse. However, it was during high school and classes she took at Aberdeen Central High School in South Dakota, that Buttolph's passion for medicine reignited. That along with an orthopedic surgery she underwent when she was high school, helped set her on a path toward a fascination with bones and the pursuit of medical school.

Her journey has continued at the University of Minnesota Crookston, where she has put together a passion for horses and a passion for medicine, majoring in health sciences and minoring in equine science. Buttolph also gets to pursue her love for riding horses, while competing in the show pen as a member of the hunt seat equestrian team, where she has helped lead the team to two IHSA Regional Championships in her two seasons as a Golden Eagle.

Buttolph has been around medicine her entire life. Born at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, MD, Buttolph was born into a family that revolved around the medical field. Her parents had met in the United States Navy, where her father was a doctor, and her mother a nurse. Being in a military family, Buttolph adhered to moving a lot, as her family moved to California and then Florida. Once both of her parents were out of the military, the family settled for four and a half years in Yankton, S.D. However, that didn't last forever.

"Even though we left the military the moving never stopped," Buttolph recalled. "We lived in Yankton for four and a half years and then my dad joined the FDA. So we moved to the East Coast for one to two years and then we moved to Yankton, S.D., and then Aberdeen, S.D. We have lived in South Dakota ever since. But my dad actually just rejoined the military about a year ago. So he is in the Navy Reserves right now."

Her time as a military kid taught Buttolph to be very adaptable, as well as to be respectful of your elders, which she continues to put into practice currently serving as a Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) at a nursing home in South Dakota.

"Being in the military made me move a lot, which made me very adaptable to certain situations," Buttolph said. "I learned to make friends pretty easily and have become more outgoing. Even though I wasn't the one in the military, being around the military definitely taught me to have more respect for elders. Especially working at the nursing home now, I say yes sir and yes ma'am. Since that is how I was raised."

During Buttolph's journeys around the country, in addition to eventually learning to love and appreciate the medical field her parents pursued, she also developed a love of horses, which would eventually help her on her path to the University of Minnesota Crookston and eventually the equestrian team. Her love of horses began on camping trips with her family, and it has never waned.

"I have always loved horses," Buttolph said. "We would go camping as a family and my activity I would pick was going on the trail rides because I just loved horses. When I was 11 or 12, I started doing different horse camps, in eighth grade is when I started to take lessons and ride not just in the summer. I actually started riding once a week. And then it kind of went from there. I started leasing lesson horses to show at local and regional shows. And then I actually got my own horse. I have always worked at pretty much every barn I have ever brought her to. I got to be around her more and got to learn about all the work that goes into caring for horses. I still have my horse and I have shown some other horses, as well. I got to borrow a fancy show horse and I showed them at regionals and nationals my senior year of high school."

It was also during high school that her passion for the medical field was fully realized, with a small assist from her other love of horses. She quickly picked from despising the thought of picking a medical field, to knowing that surgery is the career path Buttolph wanted to ultimately take.

"Everyone thinks that because my parents were in medical fields, that is why I chose it," Buttolph said when asked if she chose medicine because of her parent's careers. "I reluctantly picked a medical field at first. I was like I am not going into the medical field. I get enough of it with my parents talking about it at home. Even though I started to despise it for a while, I actually realized how much I grew up around it. My mom teaches nursing. My dad, I would go into the office and watch him look at slides. He is a pathologist. I would watch him look at slides and that kind of stuff. I never realized how much I was around it. When I got into horses and saw a lot of different veterinary procedures done, I started to like medical aspects of procedures again. And then I got into human medicine. That became my goal based on some different classes I took and the different medical side of things."

Buttolph found the perfect place to combine the two pursuits of a medical field and a love of equine science when she discovered the University of Minnesota Crookston and the learning environment that the school provided.

"I really liked the small class sizes at Minnesota Crookston and how I could do a health sciences major and still do an equine science minor and do a bunch of different classes," Buttolph stated. "The most important things about Minnesota Crookston would be that I really liked the small class sizes and the interactivity of the instructors. They are very interactive and they work with you."

Buttolph has wholeheartedly enjoyed her classes and the helpful professors at Minnesota Crookston that have helped her succeed in her classes and make the adjustment to college-level learning.

"I think I have been getting set up pretty well," Buttolph stated regarding how prepared Minnesota Crookston has made her for future endeavors. "The professors have been great. They are very flexible with schedules and classes in general. I never took an intro to chemistry class so I jumped right into Chemical Principles (CHEM 100) my freshman year and nobody told me there was an intro to chemistry class. I jumped right into Chemical Principles and Dr. (Timothy) Dudley definitely helped me through that one, and I did pretty well. That was a big class for me. It was an adjustment since it was a lot different than high school. I am in O-CHEM (Organic Chemistry), this year. It has been grueling, but it has really prepared me. They do a really good job of making sure you understand the material and not just get through it."

Buttolph's classes have also allowed her to pursue her love of orthopedics and learn more about equine and human bones, a subject that has interested her since high school.

"I'm really interested in bones. Last year, the equine science program did a horse necropsy, which is like an autopsy on a horse. It is never our horses, the horses are donated after they pass. Actually last year, Leslie (Lekatz), she is an animal science professor. I asked her if I could amputate a leg. We worked pretty hard with the bone saw and we got the whole leg off. We skinned it all the way down and we ended up breaking open the hoof and the tendon still worked and we skinned around all the muscles. It would still flex and extend. That was a really fun experience. I really like the bones and how they work. I had an orthopedic surgery when I was 15. During that whole process I got fascinated with Scoliosis and different diseases bone issues can cause. I got fascinated with orthopedics."

She has also obtained field experience in medicine, performing several job shadows and she also gained valuable lessons through her work as a CNA at a nursing home.

"My favorite experience hasn't been a resident experience," Buttolph said. "It has been seeing how we all have different degrees and goals and seeing how we all work together for the residents. Especially right now in the time of COVID-19. Some people are housekeepers, some people are nutritionists, others are nurses, and then the CNAs, but it is fun to see how it all works together. It is fun to see the different jobs in healthcare. It isn't just doctors and nurses."

During her time at Minnesota Crookston, Buttolph has also had the opportunity to carry out her love of horses and equestrian. Buttolph was not recruited by the program, but she quickly made the team as a freshman during fall tryouts and she has found her niche on one of the top IHSA programs in the region and the country.

"I got on the team the fall of my freshman year," Buttolph recalled. "Starting in the spring coach (Kylie Krueger) actually taught me how to jump. I didn't have any previous jumping experience. So I learned how to jump last year and I have started competing in jumping this fall. So far it has been pretty good. That has been going well. I really like the team aspect and the team is definitely one thing that drew me to Minnesota Crookston."

Buttolph quickly found success as she made the IHSA Zone Championships as both an individual competing in Advanced Walk Trot Canter, and as a member of the IHSA Regional Championship Golden Eagle squad competing at Cliffwood Farm in Richmond, Ill. In the spring of her freshman season.

"I have been on the hunt seat team and we won regionals last year and this year," Buttolph said. "I actually got to represent the team and individually last year at IHSA Zones. I had the possibility of going to the IHSA Zones for the team again this year. It has been a really cool experience. Definitely, the girls on the team have helped me make it through classes and the stresses of adjusting to college. Coach has been really supportive. She is very supportive of all career goals, even if they aren't equine related. She has even waived my practice schedule around chemistry labs, which can be kind of complicated."

During her time at Minnesota Crookston, Buttolph hasn't just been involved with the equestrian team, but has also had the opportunity to serve on the Student Athlete Advisory Council (SAAC). It is an opportunity that has allowed her to grow as a person, and to meet and interact with members of all of Minnesota Crookston athletic teams. During her stint time on SAAC, Buttolph has recently risen to Co-President, a role she has enjoyed.

"It is really awesome to meet different athletes from the different teams," Buttolph stated. "Without being on SAAC, I wouldn't be close with a lot of the different teams, a lot of the people I have met on different teams have been through SAAC. And a lot of people on SAAC are actually in a lot of my health science classes. It is kind of funny. Being on SAAC has definitely helped me with my time management skills and talking to different athletes about how they manage time commitments. It is a good role and I am glad that I got to get into leadership toward the end of this year. I joined it as a freshman, so last year I got involved with the different events. It is cool to work with different coaches, as well."

Minnesota Crookston has merged Buttolph's two passions of horses and medicine in an incredible way and she has learned much as she continues her pursuit toward medical school. She still has two years of undergraduate work remaining at Minnesota Crookston, but once she completes her two years, she is hoping to go to medical school in the Midwest.

So while at one point, Buttolph couldn't see herself in the medicine field. Now she is getting first-hand experience at Minnesota Crookston, while also pursuing equine science and riding the horses she has always loved to ride. It has been a perfect fit for Buttolph and has helped further her path toward a dream of being a surgeon. The University of Minnesota Crookston is proud of Buttolph and can't wait to see the incredible things she accomplishes, not only her final two years as a Golden Eagle, but as a medical practitioner that will bleed Maroon and Gold forever.

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