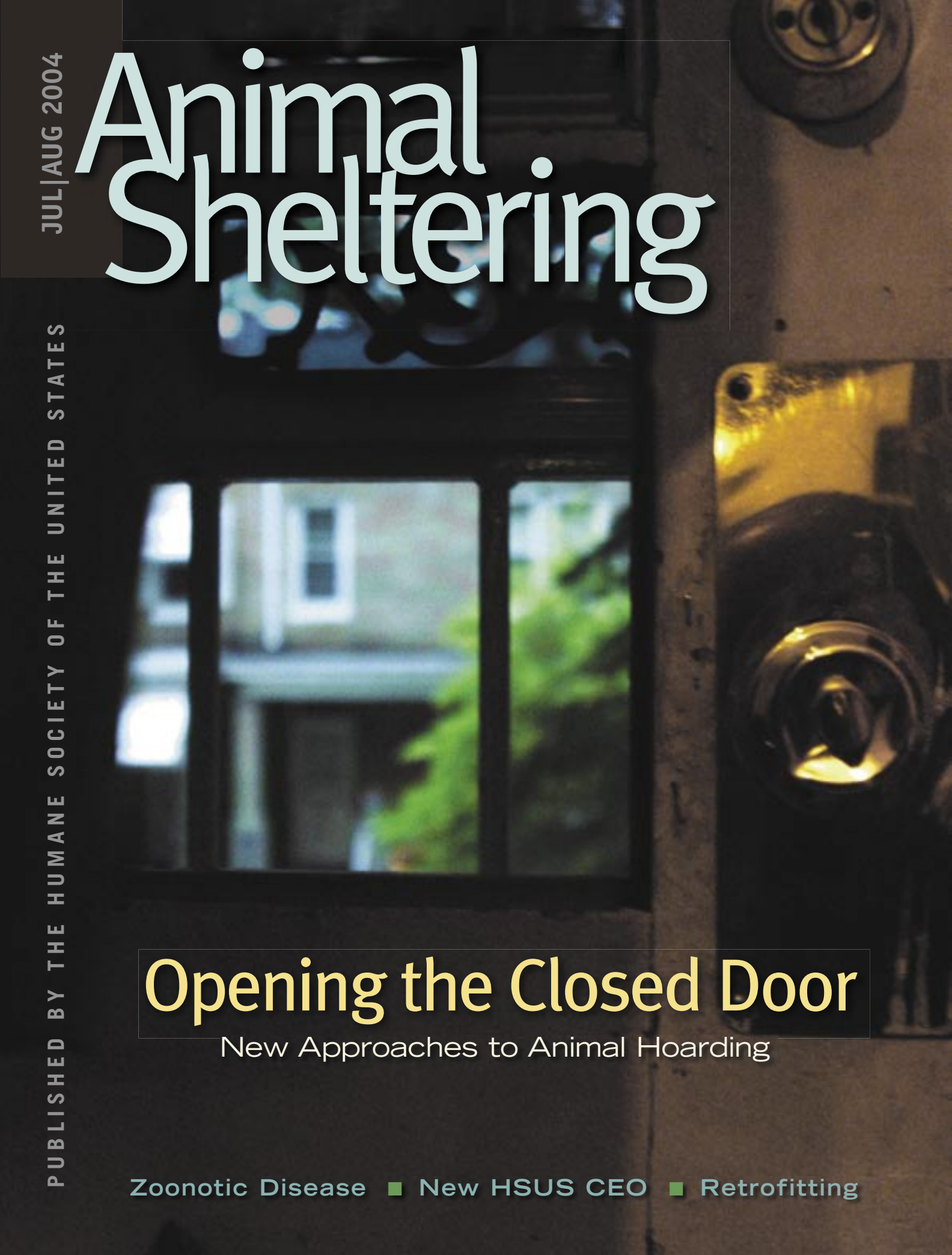
JUL|AUG 2004

Animal Sheltering

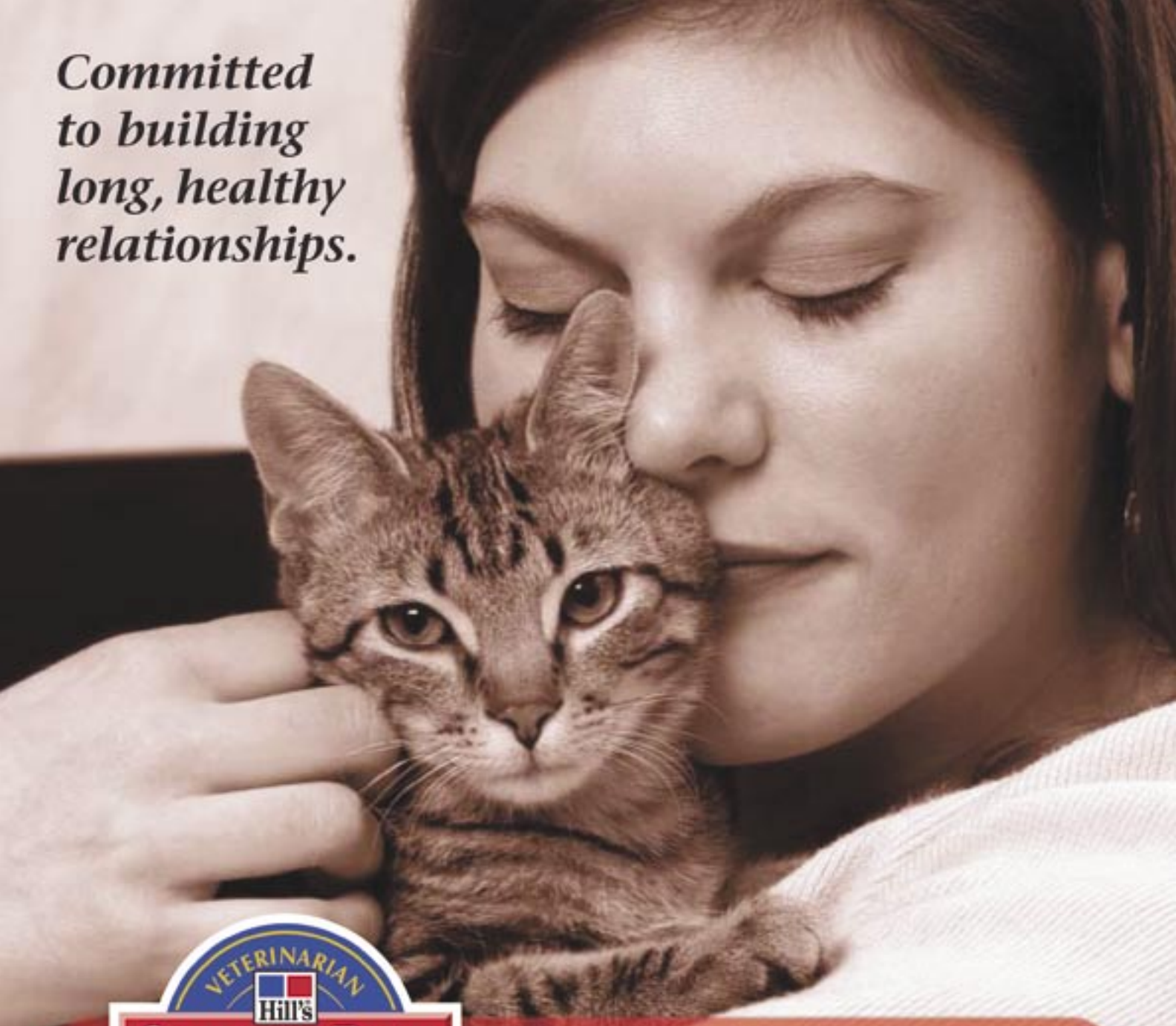
PUBLISHED BY THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES



Opening the Closed Door

New Approaches to Animal Hoarding

Zoonotic Disease ■ New HSUS CEO ■ Retrofitting



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Opening the Closed Door:
Strategies for Coping With Animal Hoarders

Hoarding is unlike other kinds of animal abuse in one significant way: Most hoarders do not intend to harm animals. The more shelter workers understand this and other psychological issues associated with hoarders, the more success they're likely to have in helping both people and animals. In exploring the phenomenon of hoarding, this article examines communitywide approaches to a problem no agency can solve alone.

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VOICES FROM THE HSUS

AS URBAN AND SUBURBAN GROWTH CONTINUE UNCHECKED, the sheltering community faces increasing public demand for assistance in resolving conflicts with wildlife. Lying in a gray area between state wildlife agencies and the private businesses that charge a fee for wildlife removal, shelters may be involved in everything from providing advice over the phone to scrambling to the scene of an injured deer or bear in the roadway. The time and effort that can be devoted to wildlife concerns varies with the situation and resources available, but it typically won't be enough to meet the demand. An informal poll conducted by The HSUS in 1996 found that virtually all shelters handle wild animals in one way or another; more than half of those we asked did so 500 times or more every year.

But the typical animal shelter doesn't have the resources to manage wildlife problems for the public. There are now private businesses that take care of wildlife problems, usually by trapping and relocating, or, as is increasingly being demanded by state authorities, killing the offending animal. Many animals are dying for nothing more than the offense of having thought that an attic or a chimney would be a secure place to make a den and, perhaps, raise young.

If they could only be encouraged to leave, the problem would be resolved. Fortunately, humane, biologically appropriate, and environmentally sensible approaches are already being advocated and practiced by some in the wildlife control industry who see things this way.

One example is found in a thriving business in Toronto, Canada. AAA Wildlife Control was founded more than 20 years ago by its president, Brad Gates, and has now grown into a business that operates four franchises with almost 50 employees. The company practices humane conflict resolution strategies, specializing in evicting offending animals while maintaining the integrity of family units. Though the invaded structures are "animal-proofed" so the animals cannot reenter, the evicted parties are left in their known home range, maximizing their chances of survival because of the continued access to known sources of food and shelter. This happens in hundreds of cases each year, satisfying homeowners' demand for action, meeting the businesses' needs to be profitable, and allowing animals the greatest chance to survive.

This approach can be incorporated into shelter operations through specialized training offered by AAA out of its Toronto headquarters and a modest commitment to the practical resources needed to make it work. One vision for the future sees the sheltering community more and more involved in wildlife services that make sense, not only as needed humane intervention but as a practical and profitable business operation as well. We see a brighter future for our wildlife when the first response to public needs can come from those who care about the animals and want to ensure the highest standards of humane treatment are employed.

John Hadidian
HSUS Urban Wildlife Program Director

For more information, contact AAA Wildlife Control at 905-831-0880; www.aaawildlife.com; bradgates1@rogers.com. Visit www.hsus.org for guidelines and other information on humane wildlife control.

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About This Magazine

Animal Sheltering (ISSN 0734-3078) is published bimonthly by The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) for everyone interested in community animal care, control, and protection.

How to Subscribe—Individual subscriptions are $12 for one year and $18 for two years. Shelters that order extra copies for their staff and/or board members receive special discounted rates when those copies are mailed to the same address: 2-9 copies are $7 per copy for one year and $10 per copy for two years; 10 or more copies are $6 per copy for one year and $9 per copy for two years.

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***Animal Sheltering* Magazine**

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How to Place a Job Ad—To post a free job announcement on our website, visit www.AnimalSheltering.org.

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SCOOP

NEWS | COOL IDEAS | TRENDS | RESEARCH | FUN STUFF

NEW ROCHELLE HUMANE SOCIETY

A Cool Hangout for Kitties

A popular accessory for ferrets proves just as inviting to felines

ODDS ARE that the sight of your sweaty next-door neighbor dozing in a backyard hammock isn't exactly what you'd call cute. But in the shelter, hammocks can successfully showcase your adoptable cats, as staff at the New Rochelle Humane Society in New York have discovered.

Shelter manager Dana Rocco says that kittens love their hammocks—even more than their litter boxes. "You can see a definite preference. It must be a lot more comfortable to sleep in," she says. "They love it. ... It just creates more space—another level."

After shelter volunteer Denise Alexanian learned that ferret hammocks could be used for cats and realized that she could make the hammocks herself, the humane society adopted the idea last summer. Now Alexanian makes all of the hammocks for the shelter. "It's a nice project for a volunteer," Rocco says.

Through trial and error, an ideal design emerged. "The hardest thing was that the strings tend to fray with time. But [Denise will] replace them for us and we just throw them through the wash with everything," Rocco says. "Thicker materials work better, folded over."

The Humane Society attaches the hammocks to dog crates that house a litter of kittens or a mother and her kittens. The hammocks have become such a popular kitty hangout spot that a group of kittens sometimes requires two.

Rocco would like to use the hammocks in the regular cat cages, but the ties cannot be attached to the cage walls as easily as to crate bars. Current plans involve gluing hooks to the stainless steel and attaching the hammock ties to the hooks, but Rocco hasn't yet found glue that is strong enough.

In the meantime, the kitty hammocks are doing a good job of showing off the shelter cats, Rocco says. "The cats look adorable in them, and it adds to the appeal—they're not just sitting in a cage." *—Katina Antoniades*

The HSUS and Pets 911 Create Alliance to Promote Adoptions

PETS911.COM is a treasure trove of information—both for people in search of a pet and people trying to provide for the pets they already have. By entering their zip codes, users of the site can search for adoptable animals in their area or locate nearby animal shelters, adoption services, and breed placement groups. Another function allows them to report and search for lost and found pets as well.

What makes Pets 911 unique from other services offering adoption postings is that users can also access information on subsidized spay/neuter services, animal-related volunteer opportunities, pet-friendly rental housing, emergency clinics, and other local resources. Even more impressive is that all this information is also available on the company's automated, up-to-the-minute, bilingual telephone system at 1-888-PETS-911.

To help ensure the success of a site so valuable to the humane community and pet caregivers alike, The HSUS and Pets 911 have officially launched a strategic partnership. The goal of this relationship is to encourage more organizations to register and post animals available for adoption on Pets 911, in addition to continuing their postings on other sites. In coming months, The HSUS will heavily promote Pets 911 to the public as the source for everything related to pets and will also incorporate the Pets 911 search function into its own website (www.hsus.org).

Pets 911 has launched a newly designed site to make it even easier for visitors to locate needed services and for shelters and placement groups to post animals available for adoption; site operators are also working with Multiple Options, a shelter management software company, to create free downloadable shelter software that will eventually be available at PETS911.com. This software will make it easy for shelters and rescues to upload to all adoption websites at once.

Even if you are currently posting to other sites, don't miss this great opportunity for additional visibility for your organization and its animals. A special registration page has been set up for *Animal Sheltering* readers—visit www.PETS911.com/animalsheltering and follow the simple instructions to get started.

—Betsy McFarland

Dogfighting: A Primer for Police

Producers offer training video to police departments and humane organizations that work closely with law enforcement

It seems it would be impossible to adequately cover a topic as difficult as dogfighting investigations in 23 minutes, but a new video from In the Line of Duty uses every second wisely to give police a thorough overview of why and how they should be involved in stopping this brutal crime.

© PETER CASELLA

Produced and narrated by Ron Barber and Don Marsh, "Pit Bull Fighting: What Every Cop Should Know" graphically illustrates the depravity and disrespect for life involved in dogfighting. Hard-to-watch footage shows men smiling and laughing while pit bulls tear each other apart; images of wounded and screaming dogs litter the film.

The violence is not gratuitous; it probably wouldn't even be possible to illustrate just how sickening and widespread the activity is. But the facts speak for themselves. Dogfighting is a half-billion to billion-dollar-a-year "industry." Busts of large operations have netted illegal drugs and hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash. Dogfighting is a felony in almost every state, but the United States is now the leading exporter of fighting pits in the world. The cruelty is unimaginable. Severely injured or losing dogs have been hanged, burned alive, run over, and shot by dogfighters; one dog even had bottle caps sewn into his neck to promote viciousness.

Throughout the film, Barber and Marsh mix images and interviews with more facts and figures at the bottom of the screen, demonstrating to police officers why dogfighting is a crime to be taken seriously. They also provide hope in the form of success stories; in Boston, they say, "the pit bull problem has virtually disappeared" as a result of law enforcement's combined efforts with numerous agencies.

"Law enforcement agencies need to start by putting egos aside, putting jurisdictions aside, and working together, calling a meeting—which was what happened in Boston," Scott Giacoppo of the Massachusetts SPCA said in an interview with the producers. "We all had the same complaints on the same houses. The MSPCA was doing an animal cruelty investigation while the animal control officer was doing an investigation into owning a dangerous dog. And coincidentally ... the person we were investigating [was] also being investigated by the local gang unit or the local drug unit for activities associated with those types of crimes."

The film tells viewers repeatedly that small crimes lead to bigger crimes, and that animal abuse committed by children leads to violence towards humans later in life. Sgt. Steve Brownstein of the Chicago Police Department Animal Abuse Control Unit makes the point that children and teenagers witness and participate in dogfighting events, watching animals scream, cry, urinate, and defecate while literally ripping each other's eyes and tongues out. "If we don't intervene, I think we're sending a message to our kids, to our teenagers: 'Violence is acceptable,' " Brownstein says.

Officials from the ASPCA and The HSUS weigh in on the importance of detailed evidence collection. As a former police officer, Ken Beauregard of the San Diego SPCA says he knows there's a tendency to focus more on the murders, the rapes, and the muggings—but that dogfighting goes hand in hand with many other crimes. He suggests that police departments and animal control agencies work together with alcohol control boards, neighborhood code enforcement officers, and fire marshals to shut down illegal dogfighting venues.

The video's narrators provide detailed information about how to identify a potential dogfighting site, describing treadmills, medical supplies, specific drugs and food supplements, and other kinds of equipment and supplies that represent clear warning signs. Noting that many cops don't recognize a dogfighting site when they see one, the producers also include a list of common signs of dogfighting—namely blood spatter, the presence of multiple restrained fighting dogs at one location, and heavy weekend and late-night traffic of both humans and dogs at one site.

Barber and Marsh also point cops in the direction of websites, newspaper listings, and dogfighting-related publications, where investigators can glean information. They provide tips from the Ohio Department of Agriculture, which found that dogfighting is a problem in every county in the state; officials there advise communities to establish toll-free numbers for the anonymous reporting of suspicious activities, create public awareness campaigns in communities and in urban high schools, train public service workers in recognition of signs of dogfighting, and ask local newspapers to screen classified ads that offer dogs for sale.

"Pit Bull Fighting" is available for $50, a price that could be made more affordable by splitting costs with neighboring agencies. For more information, call 800-462-5232 or visit www.lineofduty.com. *—Nancy Lawson*

mutterings...

Microchip Wars: The ISO Battle Continues

TO NO ONE'S GREAT SURPRISE, the microchipping debate is getting even uglier. In May, AVID Identification Systems sued Banfield, The Pet Hospital over the company's distribution of the new ISO-standard 134kHz microchips in its PETsMART locations across the country.

AVID's lawsuit claims that Banfield has been implanting the chips in animals without explaining the current state of microchipping technology to pet owners—namely, that the different frequency at which the ISO chips operate could prevent identification in chipped pets from being detected by scanners currently used in the United States.

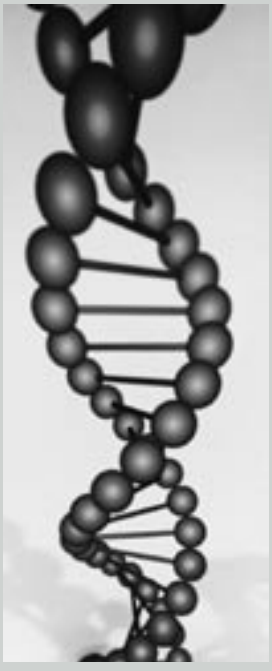
Banfield has ceased distributing the chips until more scanners are in place in shelters near Banfield clinics. Nonetheless, the company said in news accounts that AVID is trying to protect itself from encroaching competition by the ISO standard chip.

And so the plot thickens ...

Chicken Soup for the Anecdotal Soul

IF YOU HAVE A GREAT STORY ABOUT YOUR CAT OR DOG (or someone else's, for that matter), the authors of the *Chicken Soup* series of books want to hear from you. Marty Becker, Carol Kline, and Amy Shojai are looking for inspiring and entertaining pet stories to include in an upcoming *Chicken Soup* book, scheduled for release next fall. Visit www.yourpetstory.com to learn more, or send a self-addressed stamped envelope to Chicken Soup/Cat (or Dog) Lover's Soul, P.O. Box 1262, Fairfield, IA 52556 to receive submission guidelines.

Doggy DNA Shows Links Between Rin Tin Tin and Joe Boxer



RECENT SCIENCE HAS SHOWN THAT purebred dogs have distinct genetic features—so distinct, in fact, that by swabbing the inside of a dog's cheek and analyzing the DNA results, scientists can tell with 99 percent accuracy what breed of dog the sample came from.

The study, published in the May 21 issue of *Science*, showed some unexpected links between dogs previously thought to be only distantly related: for example, bull mastiffs, rottweilers, and boxers are closely related to German shepherds. It also showed that dogs such as the Ibizan and Pharoah hound—long thought to be among the oldest breeds of dog on earth—are more likely modern versions of the dogs depicted in Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Researchers hope a better understanding of purebred doggy genetics will help them identify genes that cause dogs to be at higher risk for certain diseases—research that could be helpful to both dogs and people, since many canine diseases have close counterparts in human beings.

Mutt fans may hope that as the research progresses, it will even lead to accurate identification of mixed-breed dogs—thus allowing those pet owners confronted with the stumper "What kind of dog is that?" to reply honestly: "It's a purebred beagle-schnauzer-poodle-rotty-spaniel."

Philly's Liberty Bell Rings for Greyhounds

PENNSYLVANIA GOVERNOR ED RENDELL recently signed into law House Bill 832, which makes greyhound racing illegal within the state. While Pennsylvania doesn't have any greyhound tracks, the new law will prevent future building. Greyhound advocates see this as a major victory because the bill's passage speaks to increasing antipathy towards dog racing. —*CA*

The Woman Behind the Camera

To ensure that her documentary *Best Friend Forgotten* will not itself be forgotten anytime soon, director Julie Lofton is soliciting help in encouraging local PBS stations to air the program. As she searched for ways to spread the word, Lofton took time out to discuss what inspired her to start the project—and what she hopes will result from it.

ADOPTABLE DOGS AND CATS who waited for new homes that never materialized inspired Julie Lofton to get the word out—in a big way. "I was just frustrated with the people who did not know where their local animal shelter was located, or that there even was a pet overpopulation problem ..." says Lofton, whose own knowledge of the issues derived from her experiences as a shelter volunteer. "There were very few people that came in to adopt there. So I thought since I worked in the TV and film industry that I could combine that with wanting to help the animals."

That help has taken the form of a documentary called *Best Friend Forgotten*, a film that gives the public a behind-the-scenes look at shelters by following the stories of two animals at Los Angeles Animal Services and Chicago Animal Care and Control.

Showcasing two municipal agencies helped director and executive producer Lofton send a strong message about homeless pets, she says. "When you look at pet overpopulation, the city-run facilities, the open-access facilities are hit the hardest. When you are open-access, you take in animals 24 hours a day no matter what type of physical problems, age, aggression—anything."

Lofton and her crew spent a few months at each agency in their quest to erase common misconceptions about shelters and spay/neuter, educate the public about animal homelessness, and inspire people to get involved. They introduce viewers to Clover and Oreo, a dog and cat picked up by animal care and control officers at each agency.

The film also features several "man on the street" interviews that show just how little many Americans know. The documentary opens with a series of people being asked, "Do you know what pet overpopulation is?" It's a question that leaves them baffled.

"I actually knew that a lot of people didn't know what pet overpopulation is, or where their local animal shelter was, and that's why we asked those two questions," Lofton says. "I kind of felt like the people in the animal community assume that everybody knows this because they know it and everybody they know knows it. ... When you have such a big problem such as pet overpopulation ... for nobody to know about it and know that their tax dollars are going to this is pretty startling."

One myth that Lofton wanted to discredit is that shelter animals don't make good pets, the idea that "you don't know where they came from, so therefore you shouldn't go to a shelter. I wanted to give them more of a face, so that's why we followed a dog and cat so you actually got to see them [as] more than just an animal in a cage."

Choosing the animals who would have their stories told posed a challenge. "It was actually a tough decision because I was going to have a very hard time if one of the animals got euthanized, so I was thinking, 'Oh, we'll have two happy endings,' and the people in my production company were like, 'No, because then it'll look like there's not a problem and euthanasia doesn't happen,' " Lofton says.

Both Clover and Oreo were picked up by animal control rather than surrendered to the shelters. Lofton had planned to feature one stray and one animal who had been relinquished, but finding the right people to film as they brought in their pets wasn't easy. "A lot of them were embarrassed to be there; they didn't want to admit that they were bringing an animal in," she says. Lofton and her team also wanted to avoid focusing on one particular reason for relinquishment; they instead strived to present an overview.

The documentary itself uses an overview

Julie Lofton, shown here with her friends Millie, Bean, and Batman, was inspired to do a film on pet overpopulation after volunteering at a shelter.

approach in its mission to educate. "I wanted to cover as many topics as possible, and I wanted to do it in an interesting way, so what we tried to do was actually use Clover and Oreo to discuss ... the different topics, like when Oreo comes into the facility, we then talk about, well, Oreo is not a feral cat, but if he was, this is what feral cats would be," says Lofton.

Lofton opted for this strategy to avoid lecturing viewers and to let them see things for themselves. "People are going to be wanting to know how different things happen—like when an animal gets adopted, what exactly goes into that," she says.

When it came time to portray euthanasia onscreen, Lofton took great care. "What was very important to me was not to have it be graphic," Lofton says. "I didn't want people running out of the room and screaming. ... I wanted something that would be airable on PBS and also [something] that a family could watch."

In addition to discussing euthanasia, the documentary addresses the animosity sometimes present between limited-admission and open-admission shelters. "I don't have an opinion one way or the other, and I didn't want the public to say, 'Open-access shelters are killers and everyone else is no-kill.' I wanted to portray it as accurately as possible ... My thought was anybody who's out there trying to help the animals is doing a good thing. The show is not to say, 'This is the way to do it, this isn't the way to do it.' It was just like, 'There's a problem, here's what's out there.' "

Lofton believes her project has so far been successful in opening people's eyes to the problem of pet overpopulation—and not just for those who have seen the documentary themselves. "It takes one person to let another person know, and it just spreads. I think people felt empowered to get involved and donate to their local animal shelter," she says.

Besides wanting people to support their local shelter, Lofton hopes that *Best Friend Forgotten* will encourage them to adopt their next pet from a shelter or rescue group, spay or neuter the pets they already have, get involved with an animal group in their community, and spread the adoption message to others. If they do one of those things, she says, "then I feel that the program was a success."

—Katina Antoniades

Visit www.animalsheltering.org for tips on working with your local PBS station managers and encouraging them to air Best Friend Forgotten. *Because the stations need time to plan and schedule a broadcast, those who want the film aired in October—in advance of National Animal Shelter Appreciation Week—should contact PBS by mid-August. To read a review of the documentary, access the November-December 2003 issue of* Animal Sheltering *at www.animalsheltering.org.*

Zoonotic Disease: The Enemy In Our Midst

By Kate Hurley, DVM, MPVM

We're surrounded by it in shelters every day: zoonoses, illnesses that can be transmitted between animals and humans. Potential threats include bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites of every description. They're found in feces, saliva, pus, birthing fluids, in blood and on fur. Some have to be injected by a bite or a scratch, but others require only the most casual contact. They cling to clothing, lurk on counters, float through the air, or hitch a ride with fleas or ticks. Some die quickly once they're off the animal, while others can't be killed by anything short of a flamethrower.

A two-inch thick binder full of zoonotic disease descriptions looms above my desk, and I can't possibly cover even a fraction of those here. On page 13 I've shown just a handful of the more common threats and their likely means of transmission by an animal. (Some germs are additionally spread by other means such as contaminated food or water). More information on these diseases can be found at the UC Davis shelter medicine program website (www.sheltermedicine.com) and at the website for the Center for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov).

Old dogs can learn new tricks

In case the bewildering variety of zoonotic infections we already know about isn't enough, new threats are emerging all the time. In fact, most of the newly recognized human diseases in the last decades have come from animals. Sometimes a previously mild pathogen changes enough to cause severe disease, as in the periodic emergence of highly virulent strains of avian influenza. Some novel diseases are triggered by previously unknown agents, such as the prion that causes "Mad Cow" disease in cows and New Variant Creutzfeld-Jacobs disease in humans. Other new diseases derive from well-known animal germs that suddenly decide to infect humans. For instance, the SARS epidemic is believed to have started with a coronavirus that normally infects civet cats. Researchers speculate that the highly crowded, stressful conditions of the wild animal markets where these animals are sold may have given the virus a perfect opportunity to mutate and make the leap into the human population.

Why us?

Those crowded, stressful conditions are all too familiar to many people in shelters, where infectious disease control is always a challenge. The majority of the time, affected animals don't look particularly ill. And while even the most coddled pet can carry zoonotic disease, shelter animals are at higher risk than the average pet. A recent study in the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* showed that shedding of germs increases by as much as a million-fold in the first week a cat is in a shelter. That's a lot of germs spreading around, and high population turnover means there's always a new group of animals to infect. Roaming, hunting, scavenging, fighting, and biting—the once favorite activities of many of the incoming strays—all increase exposure to zoonotic agents. Many homeless or unwanted animals are unvaccinated, infested with parasites, stressed, and malnourished, greatly increasing the likelihood of infection. Treatment with antibiotics for any reason, concurrent disease, and simply being a puppy or kitten are additional risk factors. Most readers will recognize at least a few of these factors that apply to their shelter population.

Why worry?

Zoonotic disease is such an everyday part of life for those of us who work closely with animals that it's all too easy to become complacent about the risk. We can't afford to let that happen. While many zoonotic infections are no more than a temporary nuisance, illness can be severe, disabling—even life-threatening. Young children, older folks, pregnant women, and people with compromised immune systems are at especially high risk. For instance, *Bordetella bronchiseptica* (the most common cause of kennel cough), is not normally a significant threat, but it can cause severe disease or death in AIDS patients and people with lung disease. The last thing we want is for our animals to make an adopter or foster family sick. Zoonotic infections have also led to lawsuits against shelters and veterinary clinics. Most shelters can ill afford the $54,000 a family recently demanded after they contracted ringworm from their pet dog—and that was for a relatively minor nuisance infection. In another case, a pet shop was ordered to pay $450,000 after a child lost vision in one eye due to a round-

worm infection. The negative publicity from such a case can discourage adopters, which translates into fewer homes and lost animal lives.

Just how bad can it be?

Even a well-run shelter can be hit with an unexpected outbreak. For Jeff Rosenthal, a veterinarian and director of the Idaho Humane Society, it all started with a disturbing phone call from local health authorities. Six people hospitalized for severe *Salmonella* infections had one thing in common: all had recently been exposed to cats from Rosenthal's shelter. Over the next few weeks, a nightmare unfolded. Dozens of cases occurred in both cats and humans, and ten people were so ill they had to be hospitalized. Almost every surface of this modern, seemingly clean shelter was found to be contaminated. At the worst of it, Rosenthal wondered if his shelter would ever be able to care for cats again. Tens of thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours of overtime later, the shelter was back on track and doing better than ever, but life will never be quite the same at the Idaho Humane Society. (Find out what was learned from this outbreak in the next installment of "The Doc is In," when I interview Rosenthal about his shelter's experience.)

Not just dogs and cats

This article emphasizes dogs and cats, but just about every species can carry zoonotic infections. For instance, a few years ago a California animal shelter impounded a herd of goats that turned out to be infected with Q fever (*Coxiella burnetii*), a bacterial infection that can cause severe systemic disease in humans. By the time it was all over, 245 shelter workers and volunteers had been exposed, and 30 cases of illness had been confirmed. Although there were no deaths, chronic infection can cause lingering problems, and the situation took a huge financial and emotional toll on the shelter. It is worth reviewing the common zoonotic infections of any species your shelter cares for, especially if the animals have just been taken from a situation in which they were neglected and received poor health care.

One often forgotten culprit in the spread of zoonotic disease is good old *Homo sapiens*. An infected employee or volunteer can serve as an efficient means to spread such worrisome conditions as Salmonella or ringworm. Good health care and hygiene practices for animal care staff are important parts of any program to control the spread of these infections.

What Can We Do?

LUCKILY, IN SPITE OF ALL THE RISKS, serious outbreaks of zoonotic disease in shelters remain infrequent. Good general husbandry and infectious disease control go a long way towards reducing the risk of human infection. Although not significant zoonotic threats in themselves, levels of upper respiratory infection provide a good indicator of overall disease levels. If URI is rampant, zoonotic infections may not be far behind. In the event that a zoonotic infection does slip through, a well-trained staff and clear communication among shelters, veterinarians, physicians, and public health officials can prevent a minor occurrence from turning into a major disaster. Here are some simple steps for protecting your environment, animals, and people—and ultimately, your shelter's reputation.

PROTECT YOUR ENVIRONMENT:

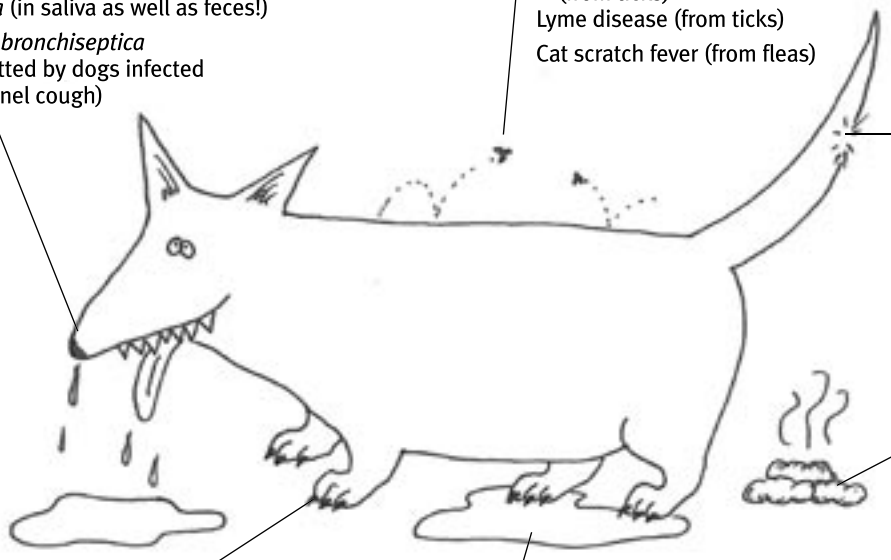
☛ Make sure all areas of the shelter are carefully cleaned daily or more often. General-use as well as animal areas can become contaminated. If possible, repair or replace materials that are impossible to effectively clean.

☛ Use a broad-spectrum disinfectant and take special precautions when cleaning up after ringworm and other resistant agents.

☛ Check or treat animals for resistant agents such as roundworm, hookworm, and ringworm before allowing in common areas. Even if your shelter can't afford a fecal exam or fungal culture for every animal, a good physical exam, a pass under a Woods lamp (or black light) to check for ringworm, and deworming for puppies and kittens will help keep common areas disease-free.

☛ Pick up feces daily or more often (some germs aren't infectious right away, but will be if feces are allowed to sit).

☛ Immediately isolate animals showing signs of infectious disease, even if a known zoonosis is not identified.



NASAL DISCHARGE AND SALIVA

Salmonella (in saliva as well as feces!)

Bordetella bronchiseptica (transmitted by dogs infected with kennel cough)

FLEAS AND TICKS

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (from ticks)

Lyme disease (from ticks)

Cat scratch fever (from fleas)

FUR AND SKIN

Ringworm

Scabies

Cheyletiella ("Walking dandruff")

FECES

Salmonella, various serovars

Campylobacter, various species

Giardia

Roundworm

Hookworm

Hydatid disease

Toxoplasma

SCRATCHES AND BITES

Cat scratch fever

Rabies

Pasteurella and *Capnocytophagia* (infections caused by dog and cat bites)

ASSORTED OTHER EXUDATES

Leptospirosis (from bacteria in urine)

Q fever (from bacteria in birthing and abortion fluids from cats as well as livestock)

THE CULPRITS: ***Here are some common or serious zoonotic disease risks for shelters, listed according to where they're most likely to be found in the assorted substances that ooze, leak, squirt or otherwise exude from our animal friends. A generic beast is depicted because some of the diseases listed are found only in dogs or cats, while others are found in many species.*** ***–KH***

PROTECT YOUR ANIMALS:

☛ Deworm all nursing moms, puppies, and kittens according to Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines (visit www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/ascaris/prevention.htm, or do a search for "CDC ascarid control guidelines").

☛ Perform diagnostics and treat appropriately for other zoonotic infections not covered by routine deworming.

☛ Use effective flea and tick control for animals and the environment as needed.

☛ If treating animals, use antibiotics only when clearly indicated.

☛ Vaccinate all animals at intake with core shelter vaccines. Consider rabies vaccination at facilities that hold animals long term.

PROTECT YOUR PEOPLE:

☛ Provide verbal and written information about zoonotic disease to adopters, volunteers, foster families, and staff. Good resources for this include PAWS/HSUS Safe Pet Guidelines at www.pawssf.org/library_safepetguidelines.htm and the CDC's Healthy Pets Healthy People website at www.cdc.gov/healthypets.

☛ Provide staff with sick leave to prevent reverse zoonoses (spread from humans to animals), and encourage staff to alert their physicians to the professional risk for zoonotic disease exposure.

☛ Provide at-risk staff with rabies vaccination according to CDC guidelines (visit www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies/Professional/publications/ACIP/ACIP99.pdf, or search for "Human Rabies Prevention").

☛ Designate non-animal areas for human food preparation and eating.

☛ Provide hand-washing stations, gloves, and/or hand sanitizer for use before, between, and after handling animals. (Hand sanitizer is the least effective choice but is better than nothing.)

AND MOST IMPORTANTLY:

☛ Train all staff and volunteers in prevention of zoonotic disease transmission. For other information and tips on disease control and disinfection, visit www.animalsheltering.org and click on "Shelter Library."

Opening the Closed Door

Strategies for Coping with Animal Hoarders

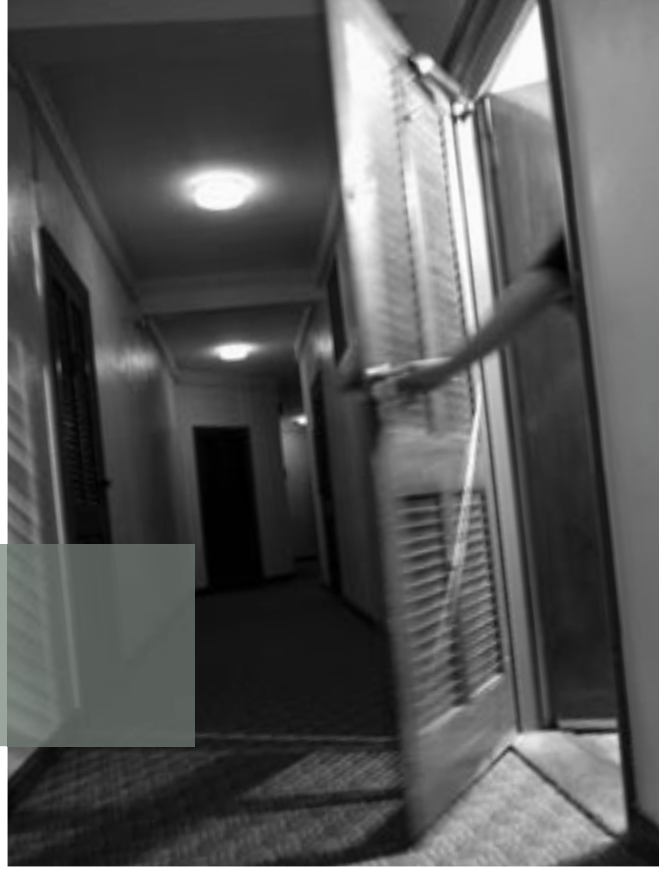
By Carrie Allan

THE SUBJECT OF ANIMAL HOARDING invariably elicits more questions than answers. Where is the boundary between a compulsive hoarder and a normal, healthy person who simply has a lot of pets? Is it the compulsion or the condition of the animals that makes a hoarder? What's the magic number that shows someone has crossed the line?

What drives people to hoard objects and animals? How can someone live in the kind of conditions witnessed in hoarder households—impassable clutter, floors caked in animal feces, air too toxic to breathe without a mask—and not seem to notice or mind?

And most importantly, how should hoarders be handled by humane societies and animal care and control agencies? Is prosecution the answer? How can animal protection advocates achieve better results for the animals who are suffering right now inside the homes of people once thought of as eccentric-yet-benign "cat ladies"?

PHOTOS BY THOMAS MICHAEL CORCORAN



In the course of researching this story, *Animal Sheltering* spoke to humane investigators, shelter directors, animal control officers, social workers, and psychologists. All of their agencies and organizations have dealt with hoarders at one point or another; many feel they've had some success in developing operational strategies to address the problem.

Many of the people who compulsively collect animals have the same skittishness, the same wildness and fear of people, that make feral cats so difficult to handle.

But they shared a universal frustration over the fact that hoarders—due to a combination of their difficult-to-treat psychological problems, their ability to change geographic location, and the often inadequate laws governing their punishment and psychological treatment—almost always start hoarding again. The recidivism rate for hoarders who are left to their own devices without continued counseling and oversight is frequently estimated to be around 100 percent.

Dave Garcia, vice president of operations and humane law enforcement at the SPCA of Texas in Dallas, has been in the field for 20 years and has investigated and assisted with scores of hoarding cases. Even though he's saved hundreds of animals from dreadful living conditions; even though he prepares intensively for cases and helps educate prosecutors and the media on the hoarding phenomenon; even though he's conducted classes at conferences and training schools on the national and regional levels, not once has he felt that he's gotten through to a hoarder on a level where he could see the light go on in her brain, he says. Not once has he felt certain he's stopped the behavior permanently.

One time, Garcia says, a couple with too many animals "saw us close down a [neighboring] hoarder, and the husband turned to the wife and said, 'Now do you understand?' And they called me, and I removed 36 dogs from their property." In that case, though, Garcia notes, it was not the investigators but a spouse who had a persuasive effect. "That's the only one," he says. "Everybody else, *everyone*, sees nothing wrong with what they're doing."

It's that blindness that makes hoarders so difficult to deal with. Many of the people who compulsively collect animals have the same skittishness, the same wildness and fear of people, that make feral cats so difficult to handle. As all field officers know, as many times as you explain to a feral cat that the trapping, vaccinations, and sterilization you're providing are for her own good, it takes a special kind of coaxing and cautious, gentle handling to help her understand that what's being offered is help.

While good results have been obtained for individual sets of animals who have been the victims of a hoarder, what frequently happens after a prosecution is all too predictable: The hoarder waits a while, and then begins collecting animals again, one at a time—the stray cat who shows up on the back porch becomes three stray cats, who become six, who soon have free range of the home and often breed endlessly as the hoarder indulges her need to obtain or "save" as many as possible.

In some cases, meanwhile, the shelter that seized the first set of animals is suffering the financial and operational consequences of having taken in hundreds of animals in one swoop, an influx few organizations are prepared to handle on their own. Frequently, the animals seized in a hoarding case have gone without proper socialization or veterinary care for so long that they suffer from diseases and major behavior problems. These victimized animals often must be euthanized, and the shelter then suffers not only the financial and operational burdens, but new PR problems as the public asks, "How is euthanasia any improvement over what these animals were living with?"

Many of these operational difficulties can be avoided through better preparation; seizure and prosecution are not always the answer. But when they are the only option left, shelters can receive help in handling the costs of large seizures through good local laws. "Bonding" laws compel the perpetrator to help with costs of care; other civil citations allow an animal owner to be declared "unfit" to care properly for his animals. Civil "unfit" laws have a lower burden of proof than criminal cruelty proceedings,

and require, once the person has been declared unfit, that seized animals quickly become the legal property of the seizing agency; the animals can then be adopted or euthanized instead of languishing in a kennel as the criminal case proceeds through court. Though large-scale euthanasia of hoarded animals is not always necessary, it is sometimes the most humane course of action—and there's no substitute for pre-education of the public, the courts, and the media in trying to help critics understand the reasons behind your decisions.

As effective as some hoarder prosecutions have been, so little is known about the psychology behind hoarding that treatments for the compulsion are in their infancy. Hoarders are notoriously difficult to study, says Randy Frost, a professor of psychology at Smith College in Massachusetts who's been studying connections between the hoarding of inanimate possessions and the hoarding of animals.

"The problem," says Frost, "is that when they get identified it's in the context of a very adversarial relationship. So the Massachusetts SPCA has come in or the health department has come in and taken the animals away, and so anyone connected with any kind of authority is looked on with distrust. So getting people at that point to talk to us is very difficult."

Because animal hoarding remains such a mystery, solutions to the problem have often involved treating the symptoms rather than the underlying illness. But many people are trying to change that. The Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium (HARC)—of which Frost is a member—was formed in 1997 as part of an ongoing attempt to begin treating the sickness of hoarding itself through an interdisciplinary approach; HARC members include animal protection professionals as well as people from the fields of psychology, psychiatry, sociology, social work, epidemiology, and veterinary medicine.

Along with preliminary attempts to address underlying causes of and treatment for hoarding behavior, HARC has also sought better definitions. In a 2002 report titled "Animal Hoarding: Recommendations for Intervention by Family and Friends," Jane Nathanson of HARC defined a hoarder this way: someone who accumulates a large number of animals; fails to provide minimal standards of nutrition, sanitation, and veterinary care; fails to act on the deteriorating condition of the animals (including disease, starvation, and even death) or the environment (severely overcrowded and unsanitary conditions); and fails to act on or recognize the negative impact of the collection on their own health and well-being.

The research conducted through HARC is a hopeful sign for those seeking to imbue the practical, hands-on work of public and private animal care and control agencies with a fuller understanding of what drives people to start collecting. Animal protection groups are developing more sophisticated and finely honed tools in their approaches to hoarders, using their connections with non-animal groups to get better results and try to end the cycle of recidivism.

Hoarding is unlike other kinds of animal abuse in one significant way: Most hoarders do not intend to harm their animals. The issue of intent can make or break a court case, and largely due to this lack of intent, hoarding often requires a less punitive and more people-friendly approach, one that employs more informational and practical resources than a single animal-focused agency can provide.

"[A hoarding case] truly is a cruelty case," says Belinda Lewis, director of Fort Wayne Animal Care and Control in Fort Wayne, Indiana. "And the animals are the victims of cruelty and neglect. But there are extenuating circumstances in many of the hoarders' cases, and we can't show intent. So if we don't have intent, then potentially we have a human victim. And if we have a human victim who is in need of services and intervention and follow-up afterwards, then if we don't provide that intervention at the same time we intervene on behalf of the animal, then we're just going to have the cycle repeat, repeat, repeat."

The more shelters understand the psychological issues associated with hoarders and the most effective strategies for combating it, the more success they're likely to have in helping both people and animals. To understand hoarders better is not to forgive what they do. It is simply better than the alternative, which is not to understand—and which invariably leads to more of the same.

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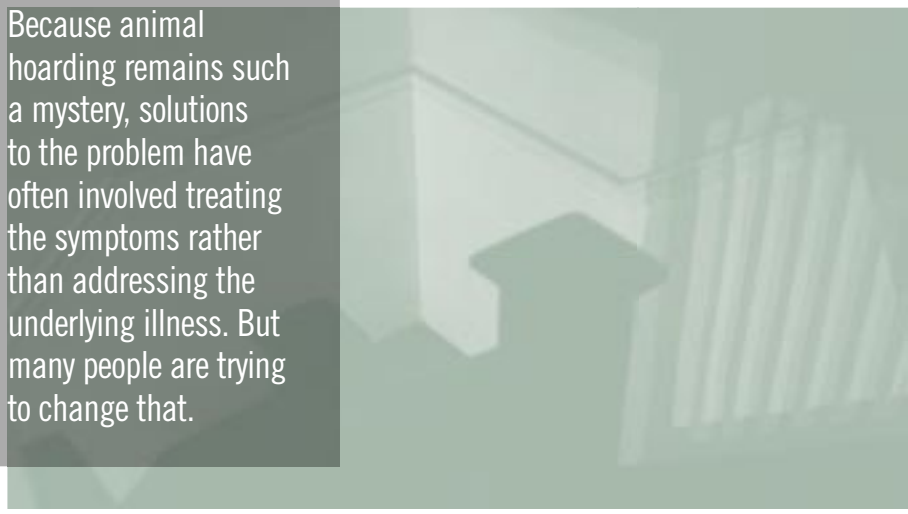

Navigating the Clutter of Houses and Minds:

OF ALL THE HORRIFYING THINGS that animal protection professionals see in the course of their careers—deliberate sadistic abuse, animals who've been used for fighting, cats who've become the victims of domestic violence, dogs who've been neglected to the point of starvation or who've been left to live out their lives on the end of a chain, unloved and unnoticed—hoarding cases may be the most disturbing.

Everyone who's worked a case where large numbers of animals have been confined without proper veterinary care or sanitation can speak of the things they remember: the clutter; the mangy, flea-ridden, wheezing animals; the feces and corpses ground into the rug; the blackened ground that turns out to be made up of living and dead flies; and most of all, the hideous, sickening smell that gets into your clothes and hair and memory and seems like it will never come out again.

But none of the homes that have become unlivable, none of the groups of animals suffering in circumstances of terrible overcrowding and neglect, none of the people inhabiting fortresses of filth and clutter—none of them started out that way. At some point a line was crossed; at some point things went from under control to out of it. "The fact of the matter is anyone, in my opinion, can become a hoarder," says Dave Garcia, vice president of operations and humane law enforcement at the SPCA of Texas in Dallas. "When that person is in this house, this beautiful home, and they've got one cat, then they get another one, and then they have five and then they have ten, the care diminishes in such minute increments that the person justifies it in their own mind."

When he lectures shelters and police about coping with hoarders, Garcia frequently starts by going to the door of the room and putting a single piece of paper in front of the door—a tiny thing. But, as he points out, if you put a single piece of paper in front of the door every day for a year, there will come a point when you can no longer open the door. "That's how slowly and methodically it happens," Garcia says. "It's not like someone woke up and said, 'Hey, I'm going to get 200 dogs.' "

And at its core, the urge to save things is not a bad one, points out Randy Frost, a member of the Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium (HARC) and a professor of psychology at Smith College in Massachusetts. "There's a sense of responsibility here that in some ways is a positive thing," Frost says. "We live in a society that throws away things that are still usable. Many times people with hoarding problems feel so hyper-responsible about this that they end up saving everything. ... They feel a sense of moral duty to protect it and not be wasteful."

It's that fine line, where a positive urge leads to terribly negative consequences, that is probably the most disturbing aspect of hoarding: the psychological blindness of hoarders, their sheer inability to see the reality of what they are doing and how they are living. Generally speaking, hoarders do not intend to be cruel, and yet the condition of the animals they keep is sometimes worse—and on a larger scale—than those hurt by the most deliberate kind of abusers.

This gap between what's intended and what's achieved would be disturbing to most people, a sign of how badly humans can miss what we're aiming for. Yet it may be particularly disturbing to shelter folks, and not only because they're especially attuned to animal abuse. Most hoarders are the victims of their own psychology, a psychology that could be described as a dark, extreme side of a sheltering personality. Many of the urges that drive animal protection workers—to care for animals, to save their lives, to encourage others not to see them as easily discarded objects—drive hoarders as well, and the contempt for people that many shelter personnel struggle to overcome is much like the fear many hoarders feel. In a 2002 interview with the *Adult Abuse Review*, Jane Nathanson, a licensed clinical social worker working with HARC, explained how hard it has been to get a particular hoarder to trust her. "I've been working with one woman for over two years," she said, "and to this day, I can't count on her trust of me. These are very wounded people. Remember that having been hurt is one of the forces driving some people to gravitate to the world of animals, above and beyond the world of humans."

Nathanson went on to note that "these are people who consider themselves, in many cases, as having a very strong humane orientation. It comes to many of them as a shock that they are facing charges of neglect. ... [T]here is so much interaction [between animals and humans] that is so intensely pleasurable, sometimes people have to make the distinction between whether they are doing it for the animals or doing it for themselves."

The ability to make that distinction separates hoarders from people who truly have the best interests of the animals at heart and are able to make their welfare the top priority. But the gap between "us" and "them" is not as large as we would like to think, as anyone who's helped investigate a hoarder disguised as a shelter or rescue can

When Perpetrators Are Victims

attest. A key difference lies not only in a person's ability to follow through on her desire to help animals, but in the degree of compulsion: Hoarders feel unable to stop collecting, no matter how detrimental it is to their own circumstances or those of the animals.

In the past, the factors that caused a person to become a hoarder were thought to be linked to material deprivation in childhood, but recent research has found that that's not the case. As a HARC member who's long been studying the hoarding of possessions, Frost says that hoarding is more likely to be linked to a tumultuous childhood in a highly chaotic household where rules weren't always made clear and bonds with parents or guardians seemed extremely tenuous.

Many schizophrenics become hoarders; other hoarders are elderly, isolated people experiencing various stages of dementia. Many of them are no more capable of caring for themselves than they are of caring for hundreds of animals. The neglect of the animals in hoarder houses is usually echoed by self-neglect.

While animal hoarding research is still a relatively new field of study, other characteristics of the phenomenon are now being suggested. Frost and others have noted that part of what seems to drive many animal hoarders is a nesting instinct: They create a home they feel is safe, where they are surrounded by unquestioning, uncritical love. At times, Frost says, it becomes almost a melding of identities. "Sometimes we see an environment where the people live like animals: 'This animal is on an equal par with me, so they can decide the rules of the house, and I don't take control over them or make them go outside.' "

Within that nest—regardless of the often unsanitary, cluttered living conditions that are readily apparent to outsiders—the hoarder feels protected. When Frost interviews hoarders in their own homes, they don't notice the dirt and the clutter and the smell, he says. But interestingly, their reactions change once they've left the setting. "We'll take pictures of the house and show them to hoarders later, in the office, and they have this startling reaction of, 'Oh my god, I live like that?' " he says.

Compulsive hoarding is a psychological disorder, and those involved in trying to help the animals who've fallen victim to a hoarder should know as much as possible about the illness. Because it is a sickness, and because of the way that hoarders' lack of intent can be perceived by

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the courts, the media, and the public, the idea that hoarders should always be prosecuted under cruelty laws just doesn't make sense. The more understanding and empathy an investigator can demonstrate in his approach, the more likely he'll be to make a real difference—both to the animals and to the person who is suffering the effects of his own delusions.

The fact that hoarders are causing themselves great misery, the fact that they're victims of their own psychological problems, should generate sympathy from animal care and control workers. But illness does not, finally, excuse behavior: We may feel great pity for people suffering from addictions, diseases, or chemical imbalances that cause them to behave self-destructively—but in the case of animal hoarding, there are other victims, the victims for whom animal protection agencies are primarily responsible.

"It is entirely possible that someone has a variety of personality or psychological disorders in these cases," says Gary Patronek, VMD, founder of HARC. "But because those conditions are present does not mean they'll be absolved from any kind of liability for what they've done."

The less contact a hoarder has with the outside world and with the other people who inhabit it, the easier it becomes to slip into the fantasy she has created.

When confronting hoarding cases, Patronek says, humane workers should keep in mind that while many hoarders have similar psychological issues, research is increasingly showing that there is no single model of hoarding psychology. Hoarders are still individuals, and there are differences in motivations, in types of pathology, in the extent of their delusions, and in their willingness and even capacity to understand what they're doing wrong and how it can be remedied.

"If it's a one-size-fits-all rubber stamp kind of approach, then it's probably not going to be as effective as a more nuanced approach," Patronek says. "Prosecution will be the primary tool in some cases, and in other cases it may be [something else]. … If you're working with Adult Protective Services and you have an elderly person who is doing this, and they're not evil or malicious and they're just a little bit out of it, perhaps … Adult Protective Services may not want to work with you if they think you're going to prosecute this person and throw them in jail or fine them. That's where recognizing the nuances of different situations can help you craft the right kind of alliances and the right kind of solutions."

Hoarders come in all shapes and sizes; the disorder seems, unfortunately, to be constantly mutating. From the stereotypical old lady with too many cats, to the man breeding and selling dogs out of his home, to the couple feeding roadkill to a house full of ducks and raccoons, to the hoarder whose property contained dogs, parrots, goats, emus, and livestock, hoarders are branching out.

A recent case Garcia handled involved a hoarder calling herself a no-kill shelter; the group even had a board of directors that was supposedly overseeing organizational operations. It didn't matter, Garcia explained to law enforcement officials: What finally determines a course of action—and what shelters should inform the public, the media, and the courts about—is the condition of the animals. It's the large numbers and poor conditions of the animals that is the common link among different kinds of hoarders.

For many hoarders, the home they've created with their animals feels like the only place of safety—and if the hoarder is elderly, if they have few friends or family, the situation can be exacerbated by their isolation. Not only will the hoarder not receive the helpful nudges that can be provided by a loving friend or family member saying, *Hey,*

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I think you've got a problem, but without a human safety net, the world the hoarder has created with her animals becomes more and more important for her to protect. The less contact a hoarder has with the outside world and with the other people who inhabit it, the easier it becomes to slip into the fantasy one she has created.

To handle these hoarding cases in a way that may decrease the terribly high recidivism rate, Frost says, it's necessary to develop mechanisms to bring the hoarder back into contact with people who can care for and support her. Even keeping a recovering hoarder in contact with animals—in a controlled environment—can be helpful, he says, citing a case still developing at the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) in New York City.

In that case, the ASPCA has allowed a former cat hoarder to assist with cat care in the shelter. Stephanie LaFarge, senior director of counseling services at the organization, says that some staff were worried when she first suggested it, fearing that the man might mistreat the cats or try to remove them from the facility. But that hasn't happened, and LaFarge says she doesn't expect it to. So far, she says, the rewards are outweighing the risks: The man enjoys the work, is good at it, and hasn't started collecting more animals.

"The fact is most hoarders are not physically violent; they're not going to steal a cat and run out the door ..." she says. "The biggest problem that we have is that once a person is coming into your shelter and, let's say, working with your cats—and usually they can handle cats very, very well—then the problem arises if the cat has to be euthanized. I've never had trouble when a cat needs to be adopted. ... The problem is that [hoarders] seem to be obsessed with avoiding death. That's their rationale—anything is better than death." But, she points out, many shelters have similar problems with their own staff and volunteers.

LaFarge compares allowing hoarders to play a role in an animal shelter to sending an alcoholic to an AA meeting. The person can be around people who have similar interests but are channeling those interests into something positive and setting a good example for a recovering hoarder.

It can be over-stimulating for someone with a collector's psychology, LaFarge acknowledges. "But basically life is stressful, and we get through stress by connecting with other people and having a support system. … It is true that going to the shelter and seeing all these cats that you can't take home and you can't fix … is stressful, but the alternative is for that person to be alone, at home, going out on the street and doing it again."

Trying to give people who've screwed up an opportunity to come around to a more humane way of living and thinking and seeing takes work and understanding on the part of shelter staff, LaFarge says. "I think it just depends on the comfort level of these people in the shelter, and maybe it would be just one or two people who say, 'I'm willing to spend time talking to this person,' on the theory that it prevents relapse and worse trouble."

A significant portion of the interaction between a hoarder and the representative of a humane organization—whether that representative is a counselor like LaFarge or an ACO or a cruelty investigator—should involve gentle, compassionate, persuasive conversation. Hoarders often are so lonely, so desperate for contact, that in order to get them to hear any of the messages about animal care that shelter workers want them to understand, staff have to reciprocate by listening. "I was with a hoarder yesterday," says LaFarge, "and she brings in these pictures of all these cats in labor and their kittens and I had to spend probably an hour looking at the pictures of these cats—and it's horrible. But I have to do that because that is her way of connecting."

Sometimes the initial visit from an animal control officer is the first human contact a hoarder has had in months—and the tone of that meeting can shape everything that follows. Investigators who understand the complex psychological issues that hoarders are coping with always start out with a gentle approach because it's likely to be the most effective.

Hoarders are apt to be suspicious, says Dave Pauli, director of The HSUS Northern Rockies Regional Office, and will try to fit you into one of three possible roles: a

biased authoritarian who's against them from the start, a neutral figure, or a resource. "If you can make yourself be that resource and let them know that you're not interested in taking their animals and destroying them, that you are trying to give them some alternatives so it doesn't reach that point," says Pauli, "many of them will respond in a positive way."

That initial approach can drive the ongoing relationship forward, says Suzi Hansen, an HSUS program coordinator who works with Pauli. Hansen always tries to approach a suspected hoarder with an olive branch firmly in hand. "You need to learn who the collector is, get some kind of profile," Hansen says. "When I first approach, I come over, get to know who they are, who is living in the household—both humans and animals—and get a sense of what the situation is. A lot of the time when you establish a relationship with that person and you establish your credibility as this positive person, they will come around and they will start working with you."

Hansen has seen that reaction firsthand. Her recommendations on food, housing, care, and other improvements have sometimes been received with gratitude—and she has even been able to talk hoarders into giving up some of their animals. "It's amazing when the animal owner will say to you, 'Oh, my cats are using their litter boxes now and this and this is happening,' seeing the results as their population decreases," Hansen says. "And then they start getting it. The light suddenly goes on, and then sometimes they're like, 'Can you take these ten today, please?' "

Working with hoarders to help them improve the conditions their animals are living in or reduce the numbers of the animals they're keeping is often a long-term project, and one that can try the patience of humane workers who see all too clearly the inadequacies of the way the perpetrator's animals are being cared for.

But it's necessary for those who want to treat the disease rather than the superficial symptoms—and it's also necessary to developing a sound, well-documented body of evidence in those all too common cases where treatment simply doesn't work. An investigator who approaches a hoarder to offer help should document every interaction he has with the person—every piece of advice given, everything he observes about the condition of the animals and their keeping, and all the ways those things change over time. If it becomes clear that the animals' condition has worsened, and that a particular hoarder is simply unable or unwilling to make the necessary changes, the agency has a long, documented history of the help it's tried to provide.

That's the way Kyle Held, a former vet tech and now a statewide investigator at the Humane Society of Missouri in St. Louis, tries to approach hoarders in his area. When hoarders get a visit from him, Held says, "I guess the initial feeling is fear, but I'd like to think that by the time I leave most of the time, they're pretty comfortable with me coming back and doing re-checks and doing more recommendations and stuff like that."

Held's medical background helps him discern not only what the animals need but how long their conditions have existed. He knows the time it takes for a wound to scab over and a scar to form, so when he finds a dog with a wound that hasn't been treated, he's able to determine the severity of the neglect. "And definitely that's a determination of how mad I'm going to be," Held says, "because I know if that wound happened in the past few days or a month ago. It's definitely going to change my perspective on the deal."

A case that Held has been handling for several years involved a woman who had about 20 dogs when he first made contact. She claimed she wanted to operate an animal shelter, so Held took her at her word and approached her with practical tips on how to run a better shelter through improved animal care and adoptions.

The relationship was time-consuming and tried his patience enormously, Held says. "This lady was so adamant about helping animals, but every time we'd open her front door she'd have them tied to every piece of furniture in the house." Held would tell her, "You can't

The more understanding and empathy an investigator can demonstrate in his approach, the more likely he'll be to make a real difference both to the animals and to the person who is suffering the effects of his own delusions.

have that dog tied up that way," and she would follow his instructions—but then when he would come back later to check up on her, she would have a different dog tied up the same way, and then he'd have to be more specific: "OK, what I meant is you can't have *any* dog tied up that way." Though having to be so specific was annoying, Held says, the woman did make attempts to follow his recommendations, and his gentle approach helped gain him repeated, hospitable access to the home in order to track the situation.

But after several years of assistance, when he observed that the dogs were declining in health and that the woman continued to get more of them—she was up to 59 dogs and their overall condition had worsened—Held finally served a search warrant and seized the dogs.

He now has a long and well-documented file on how the humane society tried to help and how the woman failed to follow the recommendations of a helpful humane investigator with a veterinary background. In Held's cases as in many others, the decision to prosecute is a matter of using your judgment—not just about the condition of the animals, but about how competent and willing the hoarder is to make improvements.

Sometimes, says Held, you feel the hairs on the back of your neck stand up and just know that the gentle approach isn't going to work. "When you ask them to do something and you see the look in their eyes, you can often tell if this is going to get done," says Held. "If they don't let you finish a sentence before they start in on an excuse, then you know it's not going to work out for the best. The people who really want to listen and learn will sit there and listen to your recommendations before they even say anything."

"You make recommendations, you watch the situation develop, you offer counseling and assistance," says Kate Pullen. "You hope they'll accept the help, but at the same time you're building your case for later in case it becomes necessary to prosecute and seize the animals."

Local laws and the attitude of the hoarder help govern agency decisions about how to deal with the problems; sometimes the only way to get a person to accept help is by prosecuting him. In the end, it's the condition of the animals that determines what to do with a hoarder: Garcia says he once handled a case where a hoarder had five cats who were in such bad condition they had to be seized. He's also worked a case where a couple had 300 cats, but the cats were still healthy enough and the couple was doing enough for them, so Garcia had to tell the law enforcement team to back off.

"I had to tell them, 'If you take this case now you're going to lose it,' " he says. "[The hoarders] were caring for the animals ... they had clean food and water. There were filled litter boxes, but I also saw bags upon bags of litter that they had cleaned that morning. ... I also found and saw receipts from their veterinarian for medicine, so I said, 'Personally, I don't like the way they're housed, so I'm going to make recommendations on that. ... If they fail to follow those recommendations, then they're willfully neglecting the animals.' That's called building your case."

And that's what must be done with many hoarding investigations, says Kate Pullen, director of Animal Sheltering Issues at The HSUS: You often have to wait until the situation is bad enough, until it's ripe enough, to take legal action—and in the meantime, try to make sure it doesn't get to that point by offering the hoarder help in the form of resources and information.

"You make recommendations, you watch the situation develop, you offer counseling and assistance," says Pullen. "You hope they'll accept the help, but at the same time you're building your case for later in case it becomes necessary to prosecute and seize the animals."

Many Strategies, Many Partners: Developing

YOU'RE AT THE DOOR OF THE HOUSE the caller mentioned. You knock, but the owner doesn't appear to be home.

But through the window, you can see scores of cats slinking around in the shadows and hear others crying from other rooms. You can also see a few cat-shaped forms that don't appear to be moving, and you fear the worst.

The ammonia smell is overwhelming. The rug has vanished under piles of feces and old newspapers and other bits of human clutter, and there you are: You've come because a neighbor complained that a few cats from next door have been getting into her garden, but now you see that the situation is beyond anything you had prepared for. There are probably hundreds of sick and dying animals in that house, and you'll need more space and transport vehicles and lots of human help and lots of specific equipment—gloves, cages, gas masks—and your shelter is already bursting at the seams from the spring cat influx and a local activist group has been hollering about high euthanasia rates and this is just going to make it worse and the owner is going to be furious and maybe a little nuts—

STOP. REWIND.

A single shelter should not have to handle a hoarder alone. To ensure better results for both animals and people involved in hoarding cases, humane organizations need to form partnerships—not just with other animal organizations that can pool resources, labor, and space but also with groups that can address the non-animal concerns.

Go back beyond the morning, beyond the week, beyond the month. In fact, rewind back several years.

It doesn't have to be this way.

In fact, it should never be this way: A single shelter should not have to handle a hoarder alone. To ensure better results for both animals and people involved in hoarding cases, humane organizations need to form partnerships—not just with other animal organizations that can pool resources, labor, and space but also with groups that can address the non-animal concerns. "If you look at human hoarding behavior, the communities that are approaching this the most proactively are establishing task forces," says Patronek. "[They're creating] multi-disciplinary teams of all relevant people, so that prior to a case everybody knows each other and all the players have a working relationship, and when a case does come up the right mix of people can be pulled together very quickly for maximum effect."

What's more, if the collaborative relationships are started early and given time to develop, hoarding cases will rarely reach the scale described above; developing task forces and partnerships can provide animal control agencies and humane organizations with more resources to intervene earlier—before the situation gets out of control, before the hoarder has completely lost touch with reality, before so many animals are suffering.

Fort Wayne Animal Care and Control's involvement in a hoarding task force since the late 1980s has had a profound effect on the agency's handling of both kinds of hoarding cases: those that intervention can alleviate and those that are already too far gone and require more drastic measures.

When Belinda Lewis took over the agency, the director of the local adult protective services agency approached her about hoarding. The woman was distressed and frustrated about the problems she'd seen; she felt the animal care and control agency hadn't been doing enough to address them because it feared the media coverage would portray the shelter as strong-arming the nice little old cat lady and taking away all her animals.

"And my response was: 'You're absolutely right, we need to address these issues, but I can't address them without your help. And what you're telling me is that you can't address them without my help,' " says Lewis. "So I said, 'Instead of knocking down doors right now, let's sit down and figure out exactly what we're going to do.' "

It was the beginning of a collaboration between animal care and control and various other agencies and departments that hold solutions to pieces of the hoarding puzzle. Because seizing the animals only addresses a symptom of the problem, it's not likely to create long-term improvements—so Lewis and her agency have developed a more systematic approach designed to address the needs of the hoarder as well as the animals.

You have to sit down together early, Lewis says, so that

Task Forces for Coping with Hoarders

when a situation arises, everyone understands the roles of each agency. In Fort Wayne, adult protective services, animal care and control, neighborhood code enforcement, and the health department are all involved in the task force. In this way, not only the conditions of the animals but the conditions of the home and the owner—which may be just as bad or even worse—are attended to by the agencies and organizations most prepared to help.

This multi-tiered approach can produce better results after a hoarder intervention. But it also helps ensure that hoarding situations don't spiral out of control; cases are usually still in their early stages when the coalition gets involved. In Fort Wayne, the collaboration among agencies has resulted in a heightened level of awareness about hoarding, and the publicity associated with hoarding cases over the past decade has benefited all agencies involved. Every time Fort Wayne Animal Care and Control deals with a hoarding case, employees use the opportunity to educate the media and the public about what hoarding is, what different agencies are doing about it, and why some of the animals might have to be euthanized.

"So the interventions are sooner now," says Lewis. "Neighborhood code enforcement recognizes it right away—they're going to call us. The board of health is going to call us. Someone is going to become aware and know who needs to be called, and as soon as one of the key agencies gets called ... we're going to get pulled into it. And if we get it first, we're going to pull them into it."

Once all the players are ready to go and comfortable in their roles, it becomes easier to plan on the fly when specific cases come up, Lewis says. Sometimes neighborhood code enforcement has to have the house condemned. Sometimes the mental health department needs to commit the suspect for a period of evaluation. And all these things in turn influence what animal care and control has to plan for in terms of care and disposition of the animals; these decisions can't be made in a vacuum. All aspects of a hoarder's problem—the psychological issues, the sanitation issues, the animal care issues, the human health issues—are connected to each other, and the cure has to be just as holistic as the disease.

In Fairfax County, Virginia, a coalition of agencies formed in 1998 after two major cases brought hoarding to the forefront of public attention: One home full of clutter burned down, causing six deaths, and that same year, a family had to be removed from a home because of major code violations. In both cases, the situations

required the intervention of several unconnected agencies—and yet each agency acted independently, resulting in a response that was less systematic and cohesive than the county would have liked.

Thus the Residential Hoarding Taskforce was started. But, says Andrew Sanderson, an animal control supervisor with the Fairfax County Police Department, animal control wasn't even included in the initial group. "It was the health department, the fire department, and then they used county services to incorporate other things—child protective services, adult protective services, waste disposal," Sanderson says. "How we got involved is because many of these hoarding cases ended up representing animals or having animals in the same house with people who were trash collectors." Hoarders who don't limit themselves to one kind of object/collection are very common, Sanderson says—yet another reason for any response team to have the capacity to cope with many different physical, medical, sanitary, and psychological elements.

Because of the collective efforts, the county's response to hoarding cases is more methodical. And with the various health and safety departments at their backs, Sanderson and the other animal control officers have more ways to get into an animal hoarder's home and more ways to compel a hoarder to make necessary changes.

If Sanderson can't get a hoarder to accept help, and if the animals' conditions aren't bad enough to charge their caretakers with cruelty, other task force members can use their authority to try to make change. The fire department can cite a hoarder for fire code violations; the health department can focus on disease issues. If the case involves dogs, the zoning board can step in to force change as well; the county has a rule about how many dogs someone can have per square foot of land.

Having all the needed players briefed and ready to go

Everybody Plays a Part: Key Partners in an Eff

PROPER HANDLING of a hoarding case requires more than just appropriate care of the animals. Before a bust, different agencies may be able to enter homes inaccessible to animal control. Afterwards, the hoarder may need psychological and medical treatment; the house may need to be cleaned or even condemned. Here's a list of departments, organizations, and agencies that should be included in a hoarding task force.

■ **Other public and private animal care, protection, and control agencies** can assist with resources and staff and provide transport and housing in cases that require it.

■ **Adult protective services/senior care groups** have expertise in dealing with the additional problems that older pet owners may have, whether these are mental (encroaching Alzheimer's or dementia), physical (illness, lack of mobility), or social (isolation, lack of family support). "Not all hoarders are elderly," says Stephanie LaFarge of the ASPCA. "But that's when a lot of them get into trouble because they're not as able to handle the problems."

■ **Mental health agencies, psychologists, psychiatrists, and other therapists** can provide the psychological background to help understand the underlying problems and motivations of individual hoarders; they can also foster relationships that may lessen the urge to collect animals. Medication has been known to help in some cases; therapy can help in others. In a 2002 interview with *Adult Abuse Review*, licensed clinical social worker Jane Nathanson pointed out the importance of working with a therapist who understands the problem: "Let's say you've worked a really long time to get this person medically and psychiatrically evaluated—when they agree to go, that's a huge leap you've taken! [But] unless the therapist takes that human/animal linkage into account—if, for instance, that therapist seems to talk to them like they've got a collection of inanimate objects—they're not going to make progress." Being privy to the discussions and planning done by a larger coalition on hoarding can help mental health professionals design effective treatments.

■ **Veterinarians** can provide crucial expertise about the condition of the animals in a hoarder home; they can recognize long-standing wounds and illnesses and can determine the severity of the animals' conditions. Should seizure and prosecution prove necessary, veterinarians will provide the testimony that can make or break a case. And vets in private practice can occasionally recognize a client who's slipping into hoarder territory, enabling them to provide advice and intervention before the situation worsens.

■ **Neighborhood code enforcement officials** can often obtain a warrant more easily than animal control if the condition of the hoarder's home or property violates local regulations or interferes with neighboring residences; animal control can then go in after the code enforcement folks have entered the house. If animals are in questionable condition but not in bad enough shape to warrant cruelty charges, neighborhood code enforcement can be a powerful ally in providing another way of approaching the problem, says Dave Holden, special agent with the Rhode Island SPCA in Riverside. "We can bring in the minimum housing [code] or the zoning official

has worked wonders in Fairfax County, says Sanderson. "You've got the social work side of it, the psychology part of it, the medical part of it—and then you've got the judicial part of it. You've got great elements all coming together for a common good," he says. "Most of these people weren't arrested or put in jail; that's not what we're there for. We all know that these collectors have a psychological problem and you try to put them on the path to better mental health so that they can live out their lives better—that's the main goal. We're not out to throw them in jail, or to seize their homes and put them in retirement places. That's not the function. The function is to get them healthy so they can go on with their lives. And having a task force with all these elements combined does that exactly, if it's done correctly."

Even if you don't have the time or resources to start a task force, pre-education can go a long way towards making sure the public, the courts, and the media understand the complex nature of hoarding, says Garcia. Garcia doesn't participate in an official task force, but as part of his intensive preparation and education efforts, he refers court officials and the media to hoarding experts at HARC and offers training to other animal care agencies and departments that may have to cope with hoarders.

"[Other agencies] are always looking to cross-train," says Garcia. "They always want as much information as they can get, so I offer that to them at no charge, sending someone to talk about hoarding, about what you can do to help them and what they can do to help you."

Once the roles of different agencies and departments are clear, once animal care and control agencies have a multifaceted cure to treat a multifaceted sickness, hoarding cases should become less overwhelming and mysterious. If you take the time to build long-term alliances now, the next time you're at the door of a hoarder's house, you'll know you're not standing there alone. ■

ective Hoarding Task Force

and get the house condemned," Holden says. "That's a real good tool—the ammonia level alone is often enough to condemn it."

■ **Fire department officials** not only can cite homeowners for violations of safety regulations—hoarding of newspapers, for example, often creates terrible fire hazards—they can also serve as neutral figures when approaching a hoarder. Sanderson, who describes his own uniform as "pretty militaristic," says he often brings a fireman along when approaching a hoarder to offer assistance. "No one ever gets mad at a fireman," he says.

■ **Board of health officials** can recognize when a residence is posing health risks to the residents and neighbors. Sanderson has even brought in officers from the county hazmat team to do assessments of the air content of hoarder houses; the ammonia and filth in the air can reach a level high enough to be considered a biohazard. Representatives from the state environmental protection agency can play a role as well; the waste from a home filled with animals can become an environmental disaster.

■ **State department of agriculture officials** may have valuable information and expertise for cases involving the hoarding of livestock.

Other groups to educate:

■ **Prosecutors, judges, and the media:** When a major hoarding case breaks in your area, use the opportunity to let the local media know what a complex problem it is. You can refer them to the materials listed at right. The more general knowledge they have in advance, the more likely they are to understand the specifics of the cases you have to handle; prosecutors are more likely to be supportive and the public is less likely to rally behind the kind old "cat lady."

■ **Meter-readers, utility employees, mail carriers, cable TV employees:** These folks may not play a big role in the solution, but they can be the first ones to notice a problem. But would they recognize it for what it is? Educating local companies whose staff have reason to be making the rounds through neighborhoods can help garner good information early, when intervention isn't such a Herculean task.

For further information, check out these resources:

☛ The website of the Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium (**www.tufts.edu/vet/cfa/hoarding**) contains a wealth of information, including the latest studies and reports on effective anti-hoarding strategies.

☛ The website of the New York City Hoarding Taskforce at Cornell University (**www.cornellaging.com/gem/hoa_nyc_hoa_tas.html**) includes answers to frequently asked questions about hoarding and a sample assessment form for those working with hoarders.

☛ A new video from The HSUS is designed to educate both animal people and other community agencies and organizations about hoarding. "Animal Hoarding: A Community Task Force Solution" is available for $6; call 202-452-1100 for more information.

☛ Sample bonding and "unfit" laws are available through the Animal Sheltering Issues section of The HSUS; call 202-452-1100 to request copies.

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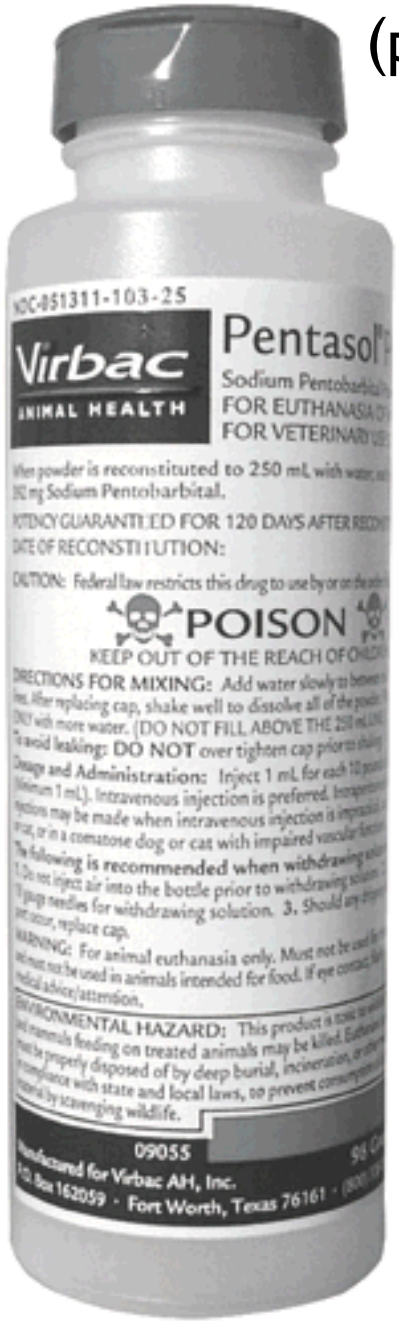

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The Politics—and Benefits—of Engagement

New HSUS CEO Wayne Pacelle *says we aren't going to win the hearts and minds of the nation until we engage people in our cause. And he should know. As The HSUS's longtime spokesman and former senior vice president for communications and government affairs, Pacelle has overseen the collection of more than five million signatures for statewide ballot initiatives. Through these grassroots campaigns at the local level and ceaseless lobbying of state and federal legislators, his efforts have led to everything from passage of laws banning cockfighting and gestation crates to increased federal protection for big cats and great apes. In a recent interview with* Animal Sheltering, *he also talked about "the unsung heroes" of the movement and the importance of celebrating victories both large and small.*

ANIMAL SHELTERING: You've visited a lot of shelters in your travels. What were your impressions?

WAYNE PACELLE: I'd say I've probably been to shelters in 35 states, and one of the things that I find most encouraging in my travels is that there are so many new shelters being constructed. There's new brick and there's new mortar somewhere in the country every week, it seems. Joseph Campbell, the writer who discusses myth, talks about how the biggest buildings in the community reflect the values of the community. And a big, grand, beautiful shelter reflects the values of the community at some level. In making that observation, I am in no way diminishing the communities that don't have that or the people who are working hard for the animals in those other communities. But sometimes you get more public support in some places, and it's really exciting to see. And in terms of the architecture of these places, you see certain things that are happening—keeping the dogs and cats in different spaces, upfront rooms where people are visiting with the animals and playing with them. There are certain things that make these facilities more inviting, moving away from the stereotype of the "dog pound" and towards a more community-based, inviting institution. So those are some of the things that I notice ... how inviting is the place for the person walking in off the street who has little exposure to humane issues but wants a companion? Whole Foods is a really successful store and chain because it's inviting, it's spacious, it's clean. The aisles aren't about to collapse on you. And I think there's a lot to be said for design and architecture and cleanliness and friendliness and efficiency. It just speaks to what the institution's about.

When you go to different cities, do you try to visit several shelters?

WP: It just depends what I'm doing and what my schedule allows. But I've been to tiny little facilities, and you know, those people are a gift—those who are working in small communities without huge financial support, without much of a population base to draw from. And my admiration's really there for those folks. I mean, in the bigger, more well-funded operations, that's great, too. But it's great to see the folks who are just in it purely for the animals.

Yeah, it's sort of a contrast between the people who have all that community support, which is good in its own way, and the people who are out there doing it on their own with nothing.

WP: Even in rural hamlets across the country, there are animal people in every little community, and those are the absolute unsung heroes of the movement—the people who are toiling away because their love and respect for animals trumps their fatigue, it trumps their difficult financial circumstances, it trumps the other commitments that they have. And it just pushes them into activism and work, and you know, those are the best people in the world. They really are. In my mind, there are no finer people because they are doing something that's purely altruistic. They're not doing it for themselves; they're doing it because they care about these creatures.

That's why we love doing the magazine so much—because we are able to talk to such dedicated people every day.

WP: Yeah, absolutely. And that's why it's great that *Animal Sheltering* exists—to let people know there's a larger universe of people who care. You're not just one salmon trying to fight upstream there. There are others who are fighting as well. And it's that collective action. You think, "Well, does my work really make a difference?" And of course it does, because every animal who benefits from attention and who gets care is a huge victory in and of itself. But there's also the collective exercise of knowing that so many thousands of people are conducting these little acts of mercy and it adds up to a merciful world and society.

You've had some experience with mainstreaming a lot of animal protection issues and getting people from all different factions on board with our cause. And that's one of the big problems that shelters in many communities face—they are located out in the weed fields or near the jailhouse and nobody knows anything about them. What advice would you have for shelters that are trying to get their communities to notice them?

WP: I think that there's no better course of action than to serve as a model for change. Others will observe this sacrificing behavior and are drawn to it—in the end, emulating that behavior. I think serving as a model in the community sets the standard for everyone to aspire to. Even if people don't reach it, they in their own way do their little acts—that's really important. But then there are marketing issues in terms of publicizing. We cannot leave these matters just up to conscience. We've got to be the best in marketing what we're trying to do and reaching out and engaging people. And there's no formula for this. It all has to do with using the media to publicize what you're doing—getting creative with press events and placement of issues in

the media to draw attention. It has to do with developing a good volunteer program to get people engaged so they feel like, "Hey, I'm contributing—this is fun, this is a good thing." It has to do with having inviting facilities and always projecting an image of integrity and professionalism. And it has to do with making strategic alliances with companies and schools in the community in order to draw more people in and to ground the programs more in the community.

It's always seemed to be sort of a catch-22: We want so badly for the public to be going to their local shelter because community support is the thing that will most help the shelter improve, and yet people go to their local shelter and, in some communities, they see that the shelter's still underfunded, understaffed, and, in their minds, underperforming—and they get turned off and they go away. It seems it's a never-ending cycle of being encouraged and then put off. So how do we interrupt that to the point where that catch-22 is stopped?

WP: Well, I think you've got to set the vision for a better circumstance. We're all about making change—that is what we're trying to accomplish. And to take something and build it from nothing—or build it from a state that is not the ideal—gives people such a good feeling that they had a hand in the construction of something. So, it's about being clear to the public: "Hey, we've got a long way to go, but you're the ones who can help us make this happen." The shelter people alone and the animal advocates out there—the leaders in a community—cannot solve all these issues. We have to have other people engaged. It always has to be a collective exercise. It's more a question of those people being leaders than being taskmasters with everything that needs to be done. And I think that drawing people into how they can help to make this situation better—there's nothing better than making people feel they contributed. That's the reward. That encourages more participation.

At a recent HSUS staff meeting, you told us you make it a point at the end of each day to ask yourself what you've done in the preceding hours to help animals—and challenged us to do the same. Your words have had an energizing effect on staff. Since you've managed to inspire a lot of people both within and outside the organization, we were wondering what in turn inspires you?

WP: I get energized by the victories and by exposure for the issues. When I see an issue get out there and I think about how this idea has just washed across the city of Detroit or washed across the state of Pennsylvania, I think, "Wow, that is great." That just enlivens me. And if there's a victory, whether it's one animal or 20 animals spayed and neutered today, or we get a law upgraded to make it a felony to engage in dogfighting, or if we have somebody turn to a vegetarian diet—whatever it is—that's what nourishes me. That's what energizes me. And I emphasize to anybody out there who gets frustrated: You've got to celebrate the victories. And they don't have to be federal legislation. They can be the tiniest things, because that's the great thing about this cause is that it's not an all-or-nothing proposition. Every little act that helps any animal is a 100-percent victory for that animal. I've seen a lot of people come and go; I've seen a lot of people burn out. And I'm not close to burning out. I see a lot of the bad stuff, and there's a lot of energy that's spent, and it can be depressing to see this terrible stuff going on, and it feels like it's you against the world. But I also don't dwell on that. I see it, I recognize that that needs to be overcome, but I focus on the victories.

What do you think is the biggest challenge facing animal protectionists?

WP: I think the biggest challenge for us is to get more people engaged. It's not enough to get people to be aware. They have to be engaged—they have to make choices in their lives. They have to make choices in terms of companion animal care, and they have to make choices in the consumer realm. They have to make choices about their own participation in representative government at the local, state, and federal level. We're only going to succeed if more people get involved, so we have to draw people in. We have to reach outside of our own skin and get to others.

Have you fashioned a plan for that yet?

WP: We're working on it. I think that you have to excite people. You have to give them something to hold onto. You have to inspire people in terms of a vision for change. So that's what all of us are to do—whether it's in the smallest community, the biggest city or state or the country—but I think that everybody has to recognize that it's not just a personal kindhearted action. This is an important social cause, one of the most important social causes of the 21st century. Animals are at our mercy, and they need a merciful response from us. And the stamp of our society is how are we going to respond to this challenge? Are we going to be decent and civilized, or are we going to be selfish and thoughtless about it? I think it's in most young people; a kinship toward animals is there. Custom and teaching can dull that sensitivity, and we need to fight to retain every child's instinct to be kind and merciful toward animals.

How did that sentiment not get dulled in you? Did something happen that turned you into an advocate for animals? It just always seems that there are particular incidents in people's lives that make them engage in the first place.

WP: Yeah, a lot of people have epiphanies. I didn't. It was just always there. When I was a little kid, I had it in me. And I think a lot of kids do. It's like you see animals as peers: "Okay, there's my friend; she happens to be Sally the cat, or he happens to be Pericles the dog." (We named some of our dogs after Greek heroes—I am half-Greek.)

I looked at a lot of pictures of animals, too. I liked the animals who were around, and I wanted to see them in the real form, but I also had all the encyclopedias dog-eared to all the animal entries. So I could pick up "P" and go right to "polar bears." I'd get *National Geographic* when I was a little kid, and I'd look and decide and see what animal stories there were—there was always one. Whether it was aardvarks or whatever it was, that was the first one I'd go to.


Wayne Pacelle and Grace

But I think that we've got a great group to market to. People love animals. They're fascinating, they're beautiful, they're funny—there's so much intriguing about them. And we just need to highlight that and then say, "Hey, they're like us in a lot of ways."

Even though our department's primary focus is companion animals, we were so excited to hear that you are going to launch a major initiative on behalf of farm animals. It seems like it's an issue that's been shunted away for too long, and it's also the toughest one to address.

WP: Yeah, it's tough because it requires personal action. It's easy do something when it requires no sacrifice. So you're asking people to change their customs and change their habits, and that's never easy. You know, people know smoking's bad, but a lot of people still do it because it's tough to break the habit. And it just shows that behaviors get very deeply embedded in people, and it's tough to change. So that's threatening to people, and at the same time most people want to see farm animals decently treated because concern for animals and basic opposition to animal cruelty is a universal value. I mean, no one now says that you should be cruel to animals—they may try to dress it up in different ways—you know, "It's my tradition" or "I'm not really being cruel." So I think that's an important point for us.

Is there a way that people involved with companion animal issues can help with farm animal causes?

WP: Most humane people are not just fanciers of particular animals. They're not just saying, "I'm doing this because I like this particular animal." They have a decent, humane sort of approach to the world: "I'm for mercy" or "I'm for compassion." And if you accept those principles, then it logically follows that you'd be concerned about animals on farms. It's not just dogs and cats who suffer, but so do pigs and chickens. So I think it's tough because we're all part of this culture, and the culture says, "Do this, do this; this is the way that we view animals." And we're asking people to rearrange themselves to look at this whole situation in a different way. And that's a challenge for a lot of folks, but I guess my recommendation on this to everybody is: Try to remove your biases for a moment and just think, *Do these creatures feel pain? And can I do something to ameliorate their condition—whether by purchasing products that are not factory farm products or abstaining from eating animal products at all?* It's tough for a lot of folks. I'm a vegan, but it was a struggle initially for me to get there. It took me many years to do it—from the age of, say, 12 to 19. And the fact that I was still eating meat didn't mean that I cared about animals any less; I really cared about them the whole time, it was a constant for me. It was just that I just thought about it more. And thinking precedes action. And I couldn't deny that I cared about my dog and I cared about my cat and I care about this horse. Well, if I care about this cow and this pig who have the same sort of heartbeat and the same nerve endings—the same will to live, the same wants for affection—how could I continue to do what I was doing?

You talk about having to engage the larger culture and how we can't do this alone. But some of the farm animal messages are the hardest for people to hear. How do you reach that broader spectrum without compromising the message?

WP: Well, I think the HSUS Farm Animals Awareness Week is good. What we're trying to do there is have people recognize that these animals are animals, they're not units of production, they're not farm animal machines. They want to roll around in the mud, they want to scratch in the backyard, and they want to gambol in the pasture.

So I think having them seen for what they are is important. I think the other aspect of this is having alternatives—making it easier for people. It's hard if you don't have options in your community. And it's great to see a proliferation of foods that are easy to prepare, easy to purchase, good-tasting. All the mainstream stores have meat facsimiles. And so much of it is education, just being able to break your habits. You can have a fantastic diet without having animals in the mix, and you can have a fantastic diet with humanely raised products, too. And it's just—it's a habit issue. So I think people need to educate themselves. They need to go on the Web and look at the HSUS Farm Animals department. And they need to read Matthew Scully's book *Dominion*, and they need to go watch *Peacable Kingdom*, a documentary about Farm Sanctuary. Those are all good things to do. ■

Q **Is there an outdated or malfunctioning feature of your building—such as deteriorating flooring, clogged ventilation, ugly paint, labyrinthine halls—that frustrates you and creates operational problems? (Or was there in the past?) How do you/did you work around it? How would you improve it if you had the resources?**

Eric Blow

Director,
Louisville Metro Animal Services
Louisville, Kentucky

I really don't know where to start. If I tell you that our facility was designed in the mid-'60s and opened in 1966, that should speak volumes concerning "outdated and malfunctioning features"! We have indoor-outdoor runs, no designed medical or isolation areas, *bad* ventilation, etc., etc.!

Let me take just one problem. The indoor-outdoor kennel runs have a trench or gutter running both inside and outside, the length of the building (approximately 85 feet; two buildings with runs on both sides; 84 runs). These gutters are of concrete and have four drains spaced evenly apart. In the mid-'80s, the cracks in these gutters—particularly the outside gutters and those near the drains—kept getting bigger and bigger. In fact, to call them "cracks" does not do them justice. They were more like fissures or chasms. No amount of water could flush and clean them. You couldn't put enough water in them to make them overflow. Heaven only knows where the water was going!

We tried concrete patches, but they lasted only days or weeks. We finally located a small company that applied "resin-compounds" to floors. After viewing the gutters, they applied a resin coating that was approximately 1/8 inch to 1/4 inch thick. This proved to be quite effective. The crevices were sealed and remained so for over ten years. I suppose the only drawback to this remedy was that the resin was translucent. It always appeared that the gutters had a layer of "slime," even when they were dry. Perhaps adding a color would have helped.

Recently the coating has been deteriorating and is beginning to peel or crack in places. The chemicals and weather do take their toll. And unfortunately, we've not located another business to supply the coating. It's our hope that we'll have a new facility before the "cracks" widen and begin to swallow small children! If you suffer a similar problem, contact an industrial floor-coating company.

Nicky Ratliff

Executive Director,
Humane Society of Carroll County
Westminster, Maryland

Kennel flooring is a huge problem. There are very few companies that can do a good job of refinishing these older floors. Finding one that can do the job is hit or miss. Flooring companies think it's a standard job, but it is anything but. All the animal oils that exist on the old floors—and the high-pressure washers used to clean the new ones—make it very difficult to find an application that will work, and when it is found it must be applied by experts.

When a company is finally identified (based on referrals and a proven track record for replacement kennel floors), the cost usually prohibits a shelter from using them, especially if you're a county entity. Governments are usually looking for the lowest bid, or at least one of the *lower* bids, and these proven companies are usually the highest bidder.

Humane organizations find it equally hard to come up with that kind of money. The old adage "you get what you pay for" must have been created by a frustrated animal shelter director. My floors are in rough shape now. The last finish started coming apart almost as soon as the job was complete. I know who can do it and make it last 15-plus years, but I'm waiting to see if the county will understand the benefits of using that company—and even if they do see the benefit, can they come up with the $300,000 to do it? Last time the bid was awarded to the $38,000 bidder. I have my fingers crossed.

Belinda Lewis

Director,
Fort Wayne Animal Care and Control
Fort Wayne, Indiana

We are in a relatively new building, finished in 1998. We are fortunate to have had good design and quality building. However, there are still a couple things I would have done differently. We used a "glazed" block throughout the kennels and the hallways. It is attractive, was recommended for shelter construction, and still is. But there is a certain level of porosity to glazed block that holds body dirt, etc. If I got to choose again, I would use "fired" block. It has a higher sheen, so it's not quite as attractive, but it's definitely the more efficient sanitation and disinfection surface.

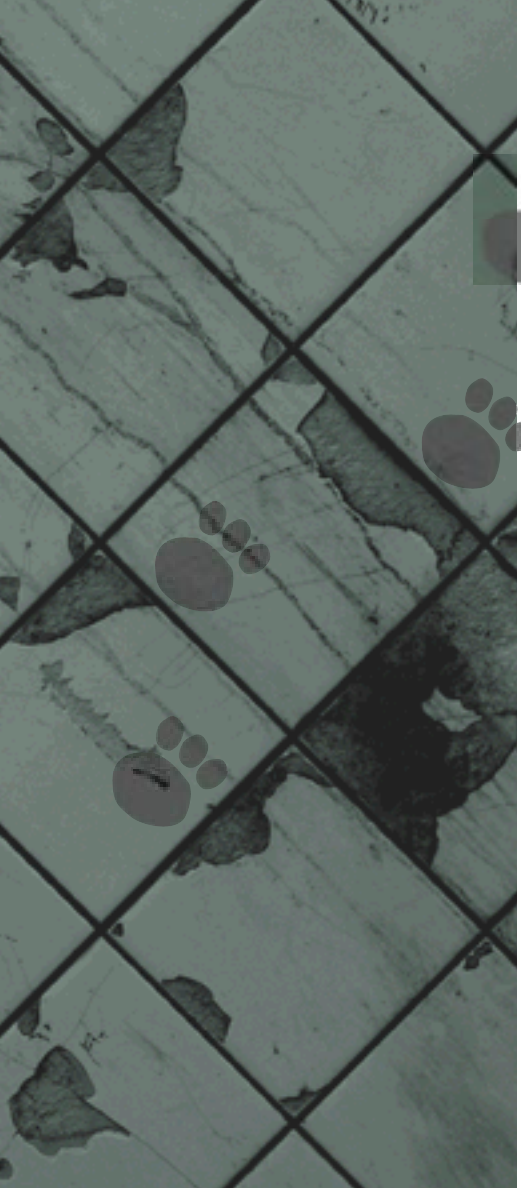
We also used a seamless flooring system. Where it was applied appropriately, it has done well. Where there were problems, it is a problem. Since we are government, our construction goes to bid. While we wrote strong specifications for the seamless flooring system used, we should have written better specifications about our requirements for application, warranty, and follow-up.

I hope someone can learn from our mistakes.

Christie Smith

Executive Director,
Potter League for Animals
Middletown, Rhode Island

I don't think any of us have "perfect" shelters. There is always something we would like to see improved. At the Potter League, we have the peeling paint in the kennels, inefficient ventilation, labyrinthine halls, congested rooms, outdated cat housing, lack of storage, etc., that almost every shelter struggles with. Most of us have aging buildings built



for dogs, not cats—and certainly not for the myriad of small animals, rabbits, birds, and reptiles that are the newest disposable pets. While we are now planning a new shelter, the existing situations are still here for us to cope with on a daily basis.

We have tried to work around our physical limitations by developing great customer service skills and always having friendly, helpful staff. The customer is able to look past the deficiencies in our building because we try to keep their interaction with us upbeat and cheerful. The shelter is clean and bright and tidy, the staff is knowledgeable, signage is professional and helpful, and the animals are well cared for with plenty of toys, bedding, long walks, and training. I think these components are most critical to our services, even if the building itself lags behind.

The one problem area that bothered me the most was our lack of space and resources for all those hamsters, gerbils, rabbits, birds, guinea pigs, and reptiles that enter our shelter. When the numbers were smaller, we housed them in the same rooms as the cats, but with the burgeoning cat population, I feared we would be euthanizing cats simply to make room for rabbits. We creatively converted a small holding room to house and showcase these less traditional animals. We invested in appropriate caging and shelving. This was a good solution for us. Some shelters have adopted habitats and housing systems used in pet stores for these small animals; visiting other shelters and pet stores is a wonderful way to get ideas of how to inexpensively and thoughtfully improve our own facilities.

When we look at problems within the building, we try to first correct ones that will best help the animals and that will make the staff's work easier. Our staff is tremendous at focusing on the needs of each animal and not complaining about the inadequacies of our physical layout. Adding air conditioning was a huge boost to staff morale and made the summer months much more comfortable for both people and animals. Even if we can't yet revamp the cat housing, we can provide any necessary equipment, feral cat boxes, toys, socialization, and volunteer labor that helps the staff and reduces stress for the animals.

The board of directors can be supportive by approving budgets that earmark funding for adequate repairs and upgrades. The administrative staff can be helpful by always looking at ways to make small improvements and recognizing the hard work that goes into caring for animals in aging buildings. And even without the fanciest new shelter, each of us can still have pride in the efforts we make on behalf of the animals and for our community. Our buildings will never be perfect, but we can strive to make them as workable as possible.

Susan Asher

Executive Director,
Nevada Humane Society
Sparks, Nevada

Our current shelter was completed in December 1979 and was considered "state of the art" at that time. Office space, storage, garages, a clinic, and model kennels—for dogs, that is.

Cats apparently weren't sitting at the design table with the architects, as their caging was relegated to the hallways and small alcoves. We had no separate air exchange, no relief from the people/animal traffic parading by cats' stainless steel, reverberating kennels, no feline housing enhancements at all. We had no isolation cages outside of the euthanasia area. As a cat lover, I was really bothered by this when I started as an office clerk in March 1980. We did the best we could for a very long time.

Fast forward to year-end 1996. Very generous grants from two local foundations, as well as gifts from private donors, funded the design and construction of a dedicated cat adoption center. We found the space for this in the attached caretaker's apartment. Bye-bye caretaker, hello happy kitties! Natural light, an enclosed outdoor exercise patio with a fountain, a separate isolation/treatment room, a cat kitchen, built-in Snyder caging with Plexiglas viewing, and enough space to keep cat kennels far enough apart to inhibit disease transmission. Did I forget to mention that this area came with its own HVAC system? This also increased our cat adoption holding by at least 30 kennels. Wahoo! And to top it all off, we were able to do this for $50,000! ■

shelterSPEAK has traditionally featured advice from the 12 members of The HSUS's National Companion Animals Advisory Group, but we're opening up the questions we ask to everyone in the field. To submit a response to the next question or ask one of your own, visit www.AnimalSheltering.org.

MARKETplace

MARKETplace

Prevention Breeds Hope

As a board member of a mobile spay/neuter clinic, shelter veteran Betsy Pullen can finally open boxes without cringing at what's inside

By Betsy Pullen

I've changed my mind about cardboard boxes.

For too many years, I couldn't look at a cardboard box without seeing sets of frightened little eyes peering up from the depths. Because that's usually how they came to us—hauled from the back of our rescue van, lifted from the trunks of cars in our parking lot, and, sometimes, when we came to work, left outside our gate the night before. In winter we would often find them huddled together in the bottom of the box, dead from exposure and frozen in their urine.

I worked in an animal shelter for nearly 23 years and, until recently, cardboard boxes reminded me, all too vividly, of the fear and helplessness of infant animals no one wanted. Boxes of infants with no place to go. And all we could offer an overwhelming number of them was a fast and humane death.

The puppies and kittens came to us relentlessly. On one morning in June, I stopped counting the numbers of kittens surrendered to us after the first half-hour because I was too busy taking them in. I remember I stopped at 45 in that 30-minute period and they kept coming all day after that. And the next day, and the next day. And the day after that. Animals pay a dear price when they are born unplanned.

And, to a lesser degree, so do their caretakers. Making that trip to a shelter isn't easy, so denial becomes commonplace. Many bringing us puppies and kittens assured us there'd be no trouble placing them because they were cute. And they said this after having just signed a statement that they understood that the chance at adoption for these animals was somewhere between slim and zero. Yes, their animals were cute. But so were the ones we'd taken in the day before and the ones we'd be taking in the next day. Sure we'd place some, but we knew there wouldn't be homes for them all.

Besides denial, there is guilt associated with unplanned and unwanted litters—guilt that people often transfer onto animals. It was not uncommon for people to blame their litters on a promiscuous female. "She keeps on having babies!" Or they transferred their guilt to shelter staff. "I left ten puppies there last week and you decided to kill them rather than find homes. And you call that place a shelter!"

These were not bad people. They had taken in a female dog or cat, fed her or sheltered her, and thought that that was enough. But it wasn't. They failed to manage her capacity to reproduce. The same was true of those with fertile male dogs and cats, but we seldom saw them. These clients presumably were unaware of their complicity because they were spared the job of "getting rid" of unwanted litters.

Everyone working in or governing our shelter—staff, board, and volunteers—knew that spay/neuter surgery was the answer. We preached the need for sterilization to every animal caretaker we could reach, both in the shelter and in the community. National humane organizations and celebrities like Doris Day, Betty White, and Bob Barker echoed our message. And the community listened.

But there were people in the community needing more than a message. They wanted to do the right thing but could not afford prevailing surgery fees. They were desperate for an affordable answer to their dilemma.

In March 2001, a group of us—former staff, board members, and volunteers of our local humane society—met their need. We began operating a reduced-fee spay/neuter surgical suite out of a 26-foot-long custom-made van. From that day to the end of 2003, we have sterilized well over 10,000 dogs and cats that otherwise would not have been steril-

KRISTA HUGHES

ized. If we assume that each of these animals would have been responsible for producing just six unplanned animals in their lifetimes (a very modest figure), we could claim that we easily have saved 60,000 unplanned dogs and cats the grief of being born into an already overcrowded world.

We set up in the parking lots of churches, schools, businesses, and nonprofit neighborhood organizations in economically depressed neighborhoods throughout Kent County and adjacent counties. Our clinical teams are seasoned professionals who have earned C-SNIP a reputation for excellence. Referrals come from word-of-mouth, from animal control and welfare organizations, from social welfare organizations, and from veterinarians.

We received start-up funds from both local and national foundations.

We operate anywhere from three to five days a week, depending on the availability of clinic staff, and sterilize anywhere from 22 to 27 animals per shift. Mindful of our mission to serve our community and our companion animals through education, legislation, and the services of a reduced-cost spay/neuter clinic, we sterilize only. No shots, just surgery. Besides sterilizing animals for people living on meager incomes, we assist those with multiple animals such as farmers with barn cats, and those trapping and releasing feral cats. We do not require a means test and do not refuse anyone our service; however, we discourage "shoppers," those who can afford the surgery and intend to have their animals sterilized but are looking for the lowest price. Along with our surgery, we dispense information on responsible pet care and refer clients to full-service veterinarians when our clinical team detects a medical problem needing attention.

We are saving thousands of low-income animal caretakers the guilt and helplessness they feel in allowing their pets to produce litters, and are giving them, instead, often for the first time in their lives, the authority to control their animals' reproduction. We are relieving the burdens of shelter workers who have been overwhelmed with the enormous numbers of animals they are expected to care for and place. We're easing the cost of animal control. Further, with every animal we sterilize, we are reducing the numbers of animals roaming the streets and roads, making neighborhoods cleaner, safer, and healthier for both animals and people.

But most importantly, we're saving animals' lives by preventing the births of unplanned litters.

C-SNIP spells prevention, a proactive and proven response to the challenges of dog and cat overpopulation. We all understandably enjoy the warm and fuzzy story of a puppy or kitten being rescued and placed in a caring home. On the surface, surgery is not warm and fuzzy ... until you meet the grateful Social Security recipient whose landlord would let her keep her kitten only if he were neutered. Or the farmer whose barn cat population exploded, leaving him with upwards of two dozen fertile cats and kittens. Or the old man living on a disability check whose only companion is the stray dog he befriended. These are the people who bring their animals to C-SNIP.

Prevention in the form of spay/neuter surgery addresses the pet overpopulation dilemma before it develops. C-SNIP is aiming for the day when there are no longer animals needing rescue, when every animal born gets a loving home. Think of it: no more rescues ... We'll just have to find our warm fuzzies somewhere else.

C-SNIP is unique to West Michigan but not to the nation. Stationary and mobile spay/neuter clinics are everywhere. But there are still not enough to meet the demand. Every community calling itself humane and progressive needs a program of prevention. It might be a clinic like ours or it might be a voucher program with local veterinarians. Whatever form it takes, it must assure that, until we control pet populations, no animal caretaker is denied access to the sterilization of his or her companion animal.

As for cardboard boxes, they're all over the C-SNIP office. These boxes are packed with promise: warm and fuzzy stuff like scrubs, drapes, surgical instruments, gauzes—and I can't wait to open them.

Betsy Pullen is a board member and volunteer for C-SNIP. Her essay originally appeared in Healing Garden Journal.

THIS ISN'T THE FIRST TIME Betsy Pullen's spay/neuter efforts have been highlighted in the pages of this magazine. As the executive director of the Humane Society of Kent County, Michigan, for 23 years, Pullen has been in the field even longer than *Animal Sheltering* and its previous incarnation, *Shelter Sense*. In June 1978, a few months after the publication debuted, Pullen appeared on page 5 under the headline "Adoptors [sic] forfeit fewer deposits." The story described the case of a local family who had violated its contract by failing to spay an adopted dachshund. A subsequent lawsuit by the humane society spurred the family into action and got the dog spayed; the legal maneuver had served as fair warning to the community that spay/neuter surgeries and adoption contracts were not to be taken lightly.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of The HSUS and the 25th anniversary of *Animal Sheltering*, we also celebrate the legacy of people like Pullen—who not only raised the consciousness of her community but also raised a daughter who, like her mother, is dedicating her life to animal protection. Kate Pullen, who directed animal shelters in Virginia and Maryland, has been the director of animal sheltering issues at The HSUS since 2000.

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