

Legislation – What’s Hot!

NOTES FROM THE HSUS ANIMAL CARE EXPO 2014

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June 15, 2014

The annual HSUS “Animal Care Expo” is the largest Animal Rights conference in the United States. This year it was held on May 20-23 in Daytona Beach, FL with nearly 1,800 participants from over 40 countries. Our CFA presence there helps us gain insight into the current thinking and upcoming initiatives of the HSUS, as well as other animal rights and animal welfare organizations. Our participation allows us to network with shelter staff, volunteers, rescue people, veterinarians and others so they can learn CFA and cat fanciers **do care**. Cat fanciers are working toward solutions and are not part of the problem.

The featured speaker this year was Jackson Galaxy, host of the television show “My Cat from Hell.” Galaxy, working without a script, talked about how he learned cat behavior through his work with rescue cats with the Humane Society of Boulder Valley, Colorado. His message was positive and upbeat, focusing on the ability of one person to make a difference.

In his opening remarks Wayne Pacelle, President and Chief Executive Officer of HSUS, announced receipt of a new \$4 million grant from Maddies Fund to HSUS to “stop puppy mills.” In prior years Maddies Fund had partnered with HSUS and the Ad Council to produce public service messages promoting the adoption of shelter pets. Their ads had used positive messaging about the value of shelter pets and countering the belief that they are “damaged goods.” Rich Avanzino, the head of Maddies Fund, has long advocated community involvement, cooperation and positive solutions to pet issues rather than a negative approach. He had previously avoided name calling and demonization of other groups. This new initiative to “stop puppy mills” reflects a shift from the philosophy of positive messaging. Avanzino himself used the “puppy mill” terminology and referred to them as a “plight” we need to end. The new goal is to interrupt the process of people looking for pets and educate them about “puppy mills.” This shift from the positive message of adopting shelter pets to attacking “puppy mills” is a change in direction for one of the largest animal funding organizations. Both Avanzino and Pacelle suggested that the \$4 million donation was just the start.

During the town hall meeting, Pacelle continued his defense of HSUS against criticism from Humane Watch and the Center for Consumer Freedom. He referred to them as being “funded by groups committing animal cruelty.” Pacelle addressed their oft-repeated message that the HSUS doesn’t run local shelters and benefits from donor confusion when benefactors think HSUS is their local agency. Instead he asserted that donors all know the difference and split their donations between local shelters and HSUS. He stated that HSUS can’t fund every shelter so they devote their efforts to the “bigger issues” and they work on the “bigger problems.”

Pacelle also struck out against Humane Watch for suggesting that HSUS would use donor money to pay the \$15 million settlement in the Feld lawsuit. Feld Entertainment (the owner of the Ringling Brothers Circus) had sued Fund for Animals, HSUS and several other animal rights groups in a RICO (federal racketeering) action after dismissal of a previous lawsuit against Feld. ASPCA previously settled for \$9 million. Pacelle did not address allegations that the HSUS liability insurance company had already denied coverage in the RICO action. He also failed to address the allegation that even if there were insurance coverage, donor funds paid for that insurance and would also pay for increases in the future as a result of the settlement.

On a positive note, HSUS continues their support of TNR (Trap, Neuter and Return) to deal with the un-owned cat population. Their new "Managing Community Cats" guide supports TNR and is a good resource for explaining the benefits to your local government. While supporting TNR, it also notes that cat licensing, cat leash laws and pet limits don't work to reduce community cat populations since those cats have no owners. The guide speaks positively about "Return to Field" programs where shelters put healthy, un-owned cats (after sterilization and vaccination) back where they were found. The rationale is that a healthy cat must know how to survive where it was picked up.

Several of the Animal Care Expo workshops focused on improving outcomes for cats taken to shelters and protecting free roaming cats. Topics included: "Putting the Cat Revolution Into Practice"; "The Pets for Life Approach to Community Cats"; "Improving Outcomes for Cats in Shelters"; "Managing Admission - It's Not Turning Our Backs on Animals in Need"; "Calling All Cat People - Ways to Encourage Volunteers in Cat Programs"; and "Community TNR: Getting a Handle on All Those Cats!". This year it seemed that none of the workshops was focused on "puppy mills" and none seemed to target cat breeders. There was no suggestion of any new anti-hobby breeder legislative initiatives this year.

Last year HSUS seemed poised to accept the new paradigm that since cats are more likely to return home on their own than be reclaimed from animal control, shelters should delay or even refuse intake of "lost" pets to improve their chances of finding their way home. Since there are too many cats entering shelters to be adopted, keeping cats out of the shelters in the first place may be the best way to reduce euthanasia. Another way to reduce euthanasia would be to return the cats to their own neighborhoods from which they were taken.

Unfortunately, this year Pacelle suggested that HSUS may be "open" to supporting legislation to reduce the holding times for "stray" cats taken to shelters. Instead of keeping cats out of the shelters or returning them to their territory, they would be kept in the shelters but available for adoption faster.

For many years pet lovers have lobbied for increased holding times for cats to give owners a better chance of reclaiming their lost animals. Pacelle stated that HSUS is open to reducing holding times for cats at shelters if that moves them

into “lifesaving outcomes.” He even suggested cats have no mandatory holding time; the ability to reclaim pets is sacrificed to make them available for adoptions. For most pet lovers, that lost pets be returned to their owners is the better outcome.

In a special session for all attendees HSUS presented skits and speakers concerning the myths about finding “the perfect home.” Many rescue groups and shelters still have the reputation of being too possessive of their animals and unwilling to place them in good homes. Long adoption questionnaires, irrelevant questions, unnecessary restrictions and other bars to adoption unrelated to the care of the animals are counter-productive. It was pointed out that some of the leaders in animal care, and most of the attendees at Expo, had things in their past which, taken in isolation, might be a barrier to adoption at some rescues or shelters. People looking to adopt but unwilling to deal with the process can and do look elsewhere for pets.

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We need your help. You are the eyes and ears of the fancy. Stay informed about proposed legislation in your state, city and county. Be aware of Animal Rights events and initiatives in your area. Keep in touch with your elected representatives. Please help keep us informed so we can help you. If you hear anything contact legislation@cfa.org.