In the Home Stretch

The future of the No More Homeless Pets movement

By Sandy Miller

In the summer of 1984, the founders of Best Friends Animal Society broke ground in southern Utah on what would become the nation's largest sanctuary for abandoned and abused animals. And so began the No More Homeless Pets movement.

Back then, around 17 million animals were being killed in shelters every year. The conventional wisdom was that it was a necessary evil – that it was kind to kill. Best Friends and the No More Homeless Pets movement challenged that conventional wisdom.

"Killing homeless pets wasn't a necessary evil, it was just plain evil and it needed to end," Julie Castle *(above)*, director of Best Friends' Community Programs and Services, told the audience at last October's No More Homeless Pets Conference in Las Vegas. "It was a watershed time and it was a game changer."

The No More Homeless Pets movement has come a long way in the last 25 years. "Super-adoption" events, low-cost spay/neuter clinics and other innovative programs have made a big dent in euthanasia rates, bringing them down to roughly 5 million today. But that's still 5 million too many.

The No More Homeless Pets movement is very much a social movement, and right now it's at the 24th mile of a 26-mile marathon. It has come a long way and there have been many successes. But there are two more miles to go: the hardest miles.

Castle, a runner herself, knows very well what those last couple miles of a marathon feel like. "It's all you can do to get to 24 miles and then all of your resources are gone, the tank is empty," Castle told the conference audience. "The first time you hit that wall, you feel like you're going to die. There is nothing to do but put one foot in front of the other and not quit. It is a matter of total commitment."

The No More Homeless Pets movement, Castle said, is at that 24-mile mark, and it will take an act of collective will to get to the finish line, and realize the dream of no more homeless pets.

Narrowing the focus

Super-adoption events and low-cost, high-volume spay/neuter programs are still very important building blocks of the No More Homeless Pets movement, but they reach what Castle calls the "low-hanging fruit." Now the movement must reach higher into the tree if it is going to break through that euthanasia total of 5 million per year, which hasn't budged for five years. "We're really going to need to get deep, to get creative," Castle says.

Best Friends has identified that the majority of animals being killed in shelters fall into four categories: cats; bully breeds (which includes pit bulls and pit-bull-type dogs); the results of exploitive breeders, including puppy mills; and owner-relinquished pets.

Those are areas in which Best Friends is focusing its campaigns in the hope of breaking through that 5 million plateau, and workshops at October's No More Homeless Pets Conference addressed these areas. But the conference didn't just examine what's wrong; it also looked at programs that are doing it right.

A record 650 people attended the conference in Las Vegas, about twice the number who attended the previous No More Homeless Pets Conference back in April 2005 in Portland, Oregon. Eighty-five percent of them had never been to a No More Homeless Pets conference before, and 69 percent had never been to an animal welfare conference of any kind. And one-third of the attendees were not affiliated with any animal welfare group. "That tells me this is a mainstream issue," Castle says.

Keeping cats out of shelters

While 30 to 40 percent of dogs who enter shelters are returned to their people, only 2 percent of cats ever find their way home again. Cats react to new and frightening situations very differently than dogs do; that difference can often cost them their lives in shelter situations. Many cats entering shelters are so traumatized that they're quickly deemed feral or unsocialized. Labeled unadoptable, they're usually euthanized.

So, the first step is to keep cats from ending up in a shelter in the

first place. The groundbreaking program called Feral Freedom in Jacksonville, Florida, is doing just that. The program, which Best Friends is helping to fund, relies on close cooperation between the city of Jacksonville and a local spay/neuter organization called First Coast No More Homeless Pets to control cat overpopulation. It's truly a community effort. In fact, the cats aren't called "feral cats"; they're referred to as "community cats."

When animal control receives a call about community cats, the cats are humanely trapped and turned over to First Coast No More Homeless Pets, where they're spayed or neutered and then returned to their natural habitat. These cats never set foot inside an animal shelter.

Rick DuCharme, a former heavy equipment salesman who founded First Coast No More Homeless Pets seven years ago, says the partnership with the city is a dream come true. "When you work with the shelter, you find a way to save animals that just a short time ago you thought there was no way of saving," DuCharme says.

In New York City, feral cat caregivers keep track of the cats in their colonies via the New York City Feral Cat Database, a project launched by the New York City Feral Cat Council, a program of the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals. In the shared database, caregivers record how many cats have been altered and how their cat numbers have changed over time. The database helps get feral cats who end up in shelters back to their colonies. Thanks to the database, only one ear-tipped cat has been euthanized at New York City Animal Control in several years, and that was due to illness.

The hope is that other communities will adopt successful programs such as the ones in Jacksonville and New York City. If they do, fewer cats will end up in shelters and more cats will find their way home again.

A beleaguered breed

It's not a good time to be a pit bull or pit-bull mix, or any other dog who just happens to look like one of the bully breeds. Thanks to widespread myths, unfair stereotyping and misinformed media hype, the bully breeds, who years ago were America's most beloved dogs, have now become the outcasts of society. Indeed, many communities have banished them altogether. "The terrier alert is up to orange," says Ledy Van Kavage, an attorney and senior legislative analyst for Best Friends.

These dogs are often deemed unadoptable – an automatic death sentence at most shelters. In many shelters, bully breeds make up the majority of dogs being killed, not because of anything they've done, but simply because of what they look like. "You guys are what we're going to need to save our dogs," Van Kavage told attendees at one of the No More Homeless Pets Conference's workshops.

One of the first steps is to get these dogs out of shelters. There are some wonderful people out there working toward that goal. People like Lori Weise, who founded Downtown Dog Rescue in Los Angeles in 1996 after noticing that homeless people on skid row had no resources to help them care for their dogs. A dozen years later, her all-volunteer, nonprofit organization has rescued, rehabilitated and adopted out more than 2,500 dogs, mostly pit bulls who otherwise wouldn't have had a chance.

In addition to helping homeless people with dogs, the organization offers everything from free dog food to free spay/neuter services to training for low-income pet owners in south-central Los Angeles, Watts and Compton, helping families to keep their pets. Weise also rescues pit bulls from shelters who would otherwise be euthanized, and operates a kennel in downtown Los Angeles, where she socializes the dogs before finding homes for them.

One of the biggest components of her program is educating the public. "We've got to get out of ourselves and into the communities where the problems are," Weise says.

Many of the dogs in the areas Downtown Dog Rescue serves have been abused and kept on chains. Weise and her organization are trying to change that. She says, "We're trying to make the dog a part of the family instead of throwing it into the backyard."

Likewise, education and community involvement are the nuts and bolts of Safe Humane Chicago, a unique grassroots campaign aimed at stopping violence directed at children and companion animals in Chicago. Best Friends is a national partner and supporter of the program.

Safe Humane Chicago involves the entire community, including social service agencies, government entities, schools, churches, police and the courts. The program teaches children about the importance of kindness to animals and steers teenagers away from the world of dog fighting. Young people mentor their younger peers about why dog fighting and animal abuse are bad. Adults learn why they should take dog fighting and animal abuse seriously if they want to protect their children from violence and make their neighborhoods safer. Participants work with government agencies to provide training and appropriate interventions for situations involving animal neglect, abuse and fighting.

"You just have to build relationships," says Cynthia Bathurst, Best Friends' national director of Project Safe Humane.

When it comes to saving the bully breeds, people need to get involved, Van Kavage says. They need to lobby to pass laws that prohibit canine profiling. They need to start blogs and write letters to the editors of their newspapers. They might also consider running for office themselves. "If we want to save these dogs, we really need to become politically active," Van Kavage says.

Puppies aren't products

Nationwide, 25 percent of dogs in shelters are purebreds. At the same time, virtually all puppies sold in stores come from puppy mills and backyard breeders, and they're breeding faster than the animal welfare community can find homes for dogs.

When it comes to shutting down these substandard breeding operations, it's all about awareness, says Kelli Ohrtman, Best Friends' campaign specialist on puppy mills. Best Friends and other organizations have managed to shut down some of these mills and bring media attention to the problem. Oprah Winfrey's show on puppy mills reached millions of viewers. When people find out where puppies sold in pet stores really come from, and how these puppies' parents are living horrible lives in small, dirty cages to increase profits for the breeders and pet stores, they often reconsider buying a puppy from

Continued on page 54

Continued from page 23

a pet store or off the Internet. "Keeping a dog in a small cage for her entire life is unacceptable to pet owners whose dogs live with them as family companions," Ohrtman says.

The way to shut down these operations for good is to take away the profit motive. If people stop buying puppies from pet stores or the Internet, the puppy mill owners will have no incentive to continue operating. "These dogs are the blood diamonds of animal welfare," Castle says.

Ohrtman encourages animal welfare advocates to lobby their lawmakers to pass stronger laws regulating commercial breeding operations, and to assist their local animal control agencies and county officials in putting the squeeze on local exploitive breeders and pet stores that are adding to the burden of local shelters. And they must continue to educate the public about the connection between puppy mills and pet store and Internet sales.

Raising awareness is an important part of Best Friends' Puppies Aren't Products campaign. One of the campaign's programs is A Puppy-Store-Free L.A., which includes conducting peaceful protests outside of stores that sell puppy mill dogs and educating potential customers about where these dogs come from.

"It helps people understand the connection between puppies they see in the pet stores and the cruel and inhumane conditions under which they are bred in these puppy mills," says Elizabeth Oreck, manager of Best Friends' Los Angeles programs. People are listening, and several pet stores have closed their doors since the program began in the summer of 2008.

Another Best Friends program is Pup My Ride, which rescues small, purebred dogs from the Los Angeles County shelter system and transports them to cities that don't have enough of these dogs to meet public demand. Thanks to the program, hundreds of dogs have found their way out of shelters and into loving homes.

Home sweet home

Before becoming Best Friends' director of Community Programs and Services in 2007, Castle spent seven years with No More Homeless Pets in Utah. During those seven years, she saw a lot of progress: Adoption numbers and spay/neuter rates grew steadily and euthanasia rates declined. But she noticed that shelter surrender numbers hardly changed.

"That was a light-bulb moment for me," Castle says. "I knew we couldn't adopt and spay/neuter ourselves out of this problem. It told me that this was a societal issue. Until we elevate the status of pets in society as part of the family, we're still going to be euthanizing animals in shelters."

Spreading the message that pets are part of the family is the goal of Best Friends' First Home, Forever Home campaign, aimed at changing the behavior that allows casual pet surrender to be acceptable. The campaign encourages people to microchip their pets, to help pets find their way home again if they land in shelters, and educates people about how to manage their pets' behavior problems so they can keep them in the family.

Of the millions of animals going into shelters each year, many are pets whose people are facing difficult times and are at a loss about what to do with their pets. Perhaps they've been stricken with a major illness, or they're losing their home, or their pet has a physical or behavioral challenge they don't think they can deal with. But what if shelters had resources to help these people keep their pets?

Until we elevate the status of pets in society as part of the family, we're still going to be euthanizing animals in shelters.

Nathan Winograd, director of the No Kill Advocacy Center in Oakland, California, says when it comes to animal control, the problem is not too many animals, but the lack of lifesaving programs. Shelters must have some key components in place if they want to become no-kill facilities – things that make up what Winograd calls the No Kill Equation.

One of those components is a pet retention program aimed at helping people keep their companion animals. To do this, shelters must be willing to work with people to help them solve their pet problems, and communities must develop innovative strategies for keeping people and their companion animals together. Animal control agencies can maintain libraries of pet care and behavior resources in their shelters and on their websites. Articles in local papers and spots on radio and television can feature topics like how to solve litter box avoidance and curb excessive barking. Other pet retention strategies include free in-home dog-behavior problem-solving by volunteers, low-cost dog training and pet-friendly rental programs.

The last two miles

It was just 14 minutes into the first women's Olympic marathon in 1984 when American Joan Benoit began to pull away from the pack. She breezed over the finish line with a time of 2 hours, 24 minutes, and 52 seconds, securing the gold medal.

But it was a 39-year-old Idaho ski instructor named Gabriela Andersen-Schiess, representing her native Switzerland, who captured the audience's hearts. Twenty minutes after Benoit crossed the finish line, Andersen-Schiess staggered into the stadium, coming in 37th. Castle included a video of Andersen-Schiess' emotional finish during her closing remarks at October's conference. Her final lap around the track was a perfect example of total commitment.

Like Andersen-Schiess, the No More Homeless Pets movement has come too far to give up now. The final couple of miles will be all about putting one foot in front of the other.

"Folks, are you ready for total commitment? Are you with us?" Castle asked the audience at the conference. The convention hall rocked with applause.

With their enthusiasm and commitment, they could very well envision, in their lifetimes, a day when every life has value, a day when every life is worth saving, a day when they live in a nation where there are no more homeless pets.

For more about the No More Homeless Pets movement, go to:

network.bestfriends.org/nmhp

Read more about the No Kill Advocacy Center's No Kill Equation at:

www.nokilladvocacycenter.org

Late one evening in 1991, Holly Sizemore was walking home from her waitress job at a Salt Lake City sushi bar when she noticed a man limping across the street toward a church. As he neared the parking lot, cats darted out from the bushes to greet him. Most of them stayed at arm's length, though a few weaved in and out of his legs. The man bent down and spread some cat food on the ground.

A feral cat colony, Sizemore realized. And it was dinnertime.

Hiding in Plain Sight

Feral cat colonies thrive with TLC and TNR

By Sandy Miller

Sizemore had been introduced to feral cats just a couple months earlier when she and a woman named Susan Allred discovered a colony of cats eating out of a restaurant Dumpster. They borrowed a neighbor's rabbit trap, scooped up the cats and took them to a veterinarian to be spayed and neutered. Then they returned the cats to the home the cats had created near the Dumpster. The women didn't know that what they were doing had a name: trap/neuter/return, or TNR.

Sizemore and Allred went back to the church and helped the man to trap, neuter and return his colony of cats. And Sizemore, who was studying theater at the University of Utah at the time, found her true calling: helping homeless animals. Today, she's the executive director of No More Homeless Pets (NMHP) in Utah. Since 2002, NMHP in Utah's Feral Fix program has helped spay and neuter more than 25,000 feral cats.

Cats – yesterday and today

Feral cats are domestic cats. They're the descendants of house cats who were abandoned by their people or who strayed away from their homes. When the cats mated, their offspring were never handled by humans, so the kittens became feral.

Becky Robinson, president and co-founder of Alley Cat Allies, doesn't like to use the word "wild" when talking about feral cats. They're domestic animals, she says. Feral cats might not let anyone get close enough to touch them, but they can't be considered wild because they've been co-existing with humans for 10,000 years.

Feral cat colonies can be found living wherever there is shelter and a stable food source – in abandoned buildings, fields and barns; in alleys behind restaurants; on waterfronts and underneath boardwalks. Rome, Italy, is perhaps the city with the largest feral cat population in the world. An estimated 250,000 to 350,000 feral cats live in Rome, organized in about 2,000 colonies, some of them in famous places like the Colosseum.

Some say that it was a colony of feral cats living in London's Fitzroy Square that inspired author T.S. Eliot to write his 1939 book of whimsical poems, *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, which Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber later immortalized in his musical *Cats*. If so, those infamous "Jellicle cats" were all inspired by real feral cats.

The beginning of Alley Cat Allies

Animals have always been a part of Robinson's life, ever since she was a girl growing up in Kansas, where her aunt and grandmother formed the first humane society in McPherson County. Robinson made animals her life's work, and in 1990 she was living in Washington, D.C., and working as a lobbyist for a large animal welfare organization.

She was walking to dinner one evening in the nation's capital when she came across a couple dozen feral cats living in an alley. She began to feed the cats and soon discovered there were no resources to help with feral cats. Meanwhile, she started getting phone calls from other feral cat caregivers who were also frustrated by the lack of information about, and resources for, feral cats. "It was clear a network needed to be put together," Robinson says.

So, in 1991, Robinson co-founded Alley Cat Allies and produced the organization's first *Alley Cat Action* newsletter. Today, Alley Cat Allies, situated in Bethesda, Maryland, is considered a leader when it comes to caring for, and advocating for, feral cats. Its website at www.alleycat.org is a national clearinghouse for information and resources about feral and stray cats. Alley Cat Allies shows people how to care for feral cats while still allowing them to be, well, feral.

"Feral cats don't need rescuing," Robinson says. "The purpose of Alley Cat Allies is to recognize these cats as they are."

Enemy number 1

It's not disease, cars or harsh weather that feral cats have to fear most. It's human beings.

A shelter is the last place a feral cat wants to end up. More

The program is proving to be a success: By 2007, the shelter's cat intake decreased 35 percent, and cat euthanasia decreased by 40 percent.

When it comes to getting funding, it's vital for caregivers to keep statistics on feral cats.

than 70 percent of all cats entering shelters in the U.S. are killed. Robinson believes that the word "euthanized" should be reserved for humanely putting suffering animals out of their misery. But feral cats, particularly feral cats in a managed colony, aren't suffering, she says. They're killed for no other reason than being what they are.

In Utah, feral cats make up 75 percent of the total number of dogs and cats killed in shelters, Sizemore says. "Even sweet, domesticated cats have little chance of getting out alive." She says that's because no one really has to go looking for a cat – there are plenty to go around. And feral cats are automatically considered unadoptable, so ending up in a shelter is pretty much a death sentence.

But NMHP in Utah is making a difference when it comes to euthanasia rates. In 1999, 45,842 cats and dogs were killed in Utah shelters. By 2007, that number was down to 32,777. That's 13,000 fewer animals being euthanized in Utah despite the state's steady population growth.

However, the euthanasia rate hit a plateau in 2006 and 2007. The way to break that stalemate and continue the decline in kill rates is to keep feral cats from ending up in shelters in the first place, Sizemore says.

How do you do that? With some dedicated feral cat caregivers and TNR, which feral cat experts all agree is the only solution when it comes to managing feral cat numbers.

Trap/neuter/return

Trap/neuter/return has been around for years. According to Ellen Perry Berkeley, author of the book *TNR: Past, Present and Future*, TNR was first practiced in England back in the 1950s.

How does it work? First, the caregivers humanely trap all the feral cats in a colony, and then take the cats in their traps to a veterinarian (who often works at a discounted rate) to be spayed or neutered and vaccinated. While a cat is still under anesthesia, the veterinarian snips off the tip of one ear to indicate that the cat has been altered. After the cats have recovered from the anesthesia, the caregivers take them back to their established outdoor area, where the caregivers continue to provide the cats with food, fresh water and makeshift outdoor shelters to protect them from bad weather.

As a method of population control, TNR works better than trapping and euthanizing because if a colony is removed and killed, more cats will simply move in and set up camp, a phenomenon feral cat experts call the "vacuum effect." The new cats – who are not spayed or neutered – will start reproducing and will bring nuisances like yowling and spraying with them.

In 2004, NMHP in Utah partnered with a shelter in West Valley City, Utah, to implement a comprehensive TNR program. The shelter provides NMPH in Utah with the locations of neighborhoods where complaints are coming in about feral cats. NMPH in Utah then goes out into those neighborhoods to mediate between feral cat caregivers and angry neighbors, and offers its services to help caregivers trap, neuter and vaccinate the cats, and return them to their areas.

The program is proving to be a success. By 2007, the shelter's cat intake decreased 35 percent, and cat euthanasia decreased by 40 percent, Sizemore says. And there has been no increase in the shelter's calls for service and no increase in cat bites. Neighbors' complaints

about things like spraying and noisy late-night mating calls are alleviated by spaying or neutering the cats. And other nuisances are resolved, too. For instance, if someone is complaining about cats using the garden for a cat box, NMHP in Utah might help the person lay some river rock in the garden or make harmless deterrents like motion-activated sprinklers available at little or no cost.

And there's something new on the horizon that could have a dramatic impact on the numbers of feral and stray cats. It's called Gonazon, a silicone implant administered by injection that's been shown to suppress fertility for up to three years in cats. It has already been approved for one-year contraception of female dogs in Europe, and the hope is to eventually bring it to the U.S. for use in feral cats.

The use of Gonazon would be less expensive and time-consuming than spay/neuter surgery. "You could do this in the field: trap an entire colony and very quickly stop reproduction," says Karen Green, director of outreach for the Alliance for Contraception in Cats and Dogs (ACC&D), based in Portland, Oregon. "It could make a huge difference."

The cats would have to be given a short-acting sedative to clip their ears, but they could recover in the field. It would also be less expensive to administer and easier on the cats than surgical sterilization – no transporting to the vet, no sterile surgical suites, no incisions, no long recovery times.

Though the goal of ACC&D is to eventually find a permanent single-injection sterilization method, the three-year contraceptive would still go far in bringing down the numbers of feral cats. "At a minimum, you could buy time with this," Green says.

Saving money – and saving cats

NMHP in Utah did some research and found that West Valley City was saving between $30,000 and $60,000 a year by teaming up on the TNR program. Today, the city provides $20,000 a year toward the project.

Many other cities, towns and counties are also discovering that it's much cheaper to help fund TNR programs than to board and euthanize the ferals. In fact, TNR is saving so much money that more cities and towns are financing it, in part or in whole, with public funds, according to Berkeley. The TNR program of Orange County Animal Services in Florida has been funded by the county since 1995; by 2001, the program had already saved the county more than $650,000.

When it comes to getting funding, it's vital for caregivers to keep statistics on feral cats. They have to be able to show public officials and grantors that what they're doing is making a difference, says Bryan Kortis, executive director of Neighborhood Cats, based in New York City. "If they're going to change policy to support TNR or give you money, you have to be accountable. You have to show your successes," Kortis says.

One way to keep track of the numbers is by using the online feral cat database specially designed by Neighborhood Cats. In

The Do's and Don'ts of Feral Cats

DO's:

- Get advice, support and equipment for trap/neuter/return through the feral cat grassroots network in your area. Ask your veterinarian for contacts.
- Line up a vet or spay/neuter clinic to perform free or reduced-rate spay/neuter surgeries.
- Trap the cats yourself. It's easier than you think!
- Return the cats and provide simple, long-term care.

DON'Ts:

- Don't bring feral cats to a shelter. Almost all feral cats are killed in shelters because they are considered unadoptable.
- Don't contact animal control to trap the feral cats and kittens. They will be killed because they are considered unadoptable.
- Don't borrow a trap from a shelter or animal control. You may have to bring the cats in, and they will be killed because they are considered unadoptable.

the database, caregivers in a community keep track of the cats in their colonies, recording how many have been altered and how their numbers change over time. Databases are currently being used in about nine communities around the country, Kortis says.

The databases also help get feral cats who end up in shelters back to their colonies. Thanks to the New York City Feral Cat Database (a project launched by the New York City Feral Cat Council, a program of the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals), only one ear-tipped cat has been euthanized at New York City Animal Control in three years, and that was due to illness.

The benefits of feral cats

It was a cold February morning and Shannon Riddle of Best Friends Animal Society was carefully navigating a van down a very icy highway to Paria, Utah, a tiny town nestled in the shadow of the breathtaking Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. Also on board was Shelly Kotter, coordinator of Best Friends' Feral Cat Program. The back of the van was piled high with huge bags of dry cat food, cases of wet food, and several large plastic containers with holes cut out of them (to be used as cozy hiding places and shelter from the cold).

Continued on page 50

Continued from page 29

Inside pet carriers covered with blankets were three very quiet feral cats. "Feral cats don't make a sound," Kotter says. "They don't want you to know they're there."

Two of the cats had once been cared for by an 82-year-old woman, but she was going into a nursing home and had no family or friends to continue caring for the cats. The third cat came from a Utah shelter, where he was scheduled to be euthanized. But thanks to some dedicated shelter volunteers who called Best Friends, the cats were now bound for life on an organic farm, a place where they would have food, fresh water and shelter from the cold. A place where they can live out their lives being just who they are.

Allen Family Farms sits on eight and a half beautiful acres just outside Paria. It's where Kristie Allen and her husband, Dustin, a heavy-equipment technician for the state of Arizona, have chosen to raise their family, which includes four-year-old David and a baby on the way. The conservation-minded Allens are building a bottle house, and they grow organic carrots, potatoes, tomatoes, peas, okra, corn and other vegetables, which they sell to friends and neighbors, and at farmers' markets.

Last season, the squirrels and rabbits ate almost all their crops. As luck would have it, Kotter's husband, Brent, just happened to be building a water tank on property adjacent to the Allens' land, and he heard about their dilemma. He told the Allens that he knew just the person they should talk to: his wife, Shelly. And that's

Do Feral Cats Kill Wildlife? The Fur Flies.

When a few endangered birds, including rare piping plovers, were found dead on the beach of the quaint tourist town of Cape May, New Jersey, feral cats were immediately named the prime suspects.

But some argued that there was no proof that cats were the culprits. The town's mayor, and former public works director, even voiced doubts, saying that although he had seen numerous wildlife tracks on the beach, he'd never seen cat tracks.

Both birds and cats are important parts of this Victorian seaside resort's landscape. Cape May is nirvana for bird-watching enthusiasts, and tourism pumps millions of dollars into the state's economy each year. So when the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection threatened to withhold the town's beach sand replenishment money until the town approved a beach-management plan, business owners got nervous.

But approving the beach management plan as it was originally written would have destroyed a very successful trap/neuter/return program that had already reduced the number of feral cats from 450 to about 100 over the past decade, according to Becky Robinson, president of the advocacy group Alley Cat Allies. "Cape May is an absolute success story, probably more than any other program in the country," Robinson says.

So the city council tabled the original beach-management plan and, on March 4, approved a new plan that allows Cape May's successful TNR program to remain in place. "It was a victory for trap/neuter/return in Cape May," Robinson says. "City council leaders acknowledged that the 12-year-old program had received national and international recognition for its success in reducing the city's population of feral cats. The city council members stated their belief that the trap/neuter/return program is vital to Cape May and must be protected."

Still, the bird advocates have their concerns. The American Bird Conservancy says scientists estimate that free-roaming cats kill hundreds of millions of birds, small mammals, reptiles and amphibians each year. According to the organization's website, cat predation is an added stress on wildlife populations already struggling to survive habitat loss, pollution, pesticides and other human impacts.

But it's important to differentiate roaming house cats from true ferals. Cat advocates point to a number of other studies that show that cats aren't detrimental at all to bird and other wildlife species. According to Alley Cat Allies, feral cats are opportunistic feeders – they're not going to go to the trouble of catching birds if they have Dumpsters to dine from or if they can get handouts from people. When cats do hunt, rodents are their meal of choice. And there are still plenty of rodents around, proving that cats can prey on a population without obliterating it.

Robinson says unfairly targeting feral cats as the destroyers of wildlife ignores the real culprits – human beings – who are decimating wildlife habitats with their urban sprawl and pollution.

To be sure, some cats do kill birds. But the question of whether or not they're detrimental to bird species is still a matter for debate, with passionate people on both sides of the issue.

being released to join the other cats. Today, the feral cats are "just like our family," Kristie says.

The Los Angeles Police Department has also discovered the benefits of feral cats. The Working Cats program of Voice for the Animals, an animal advocacy and rescue group based in Los Angeles, has placed feral cats in police stations with rodent problems. The cats keep the rat population in check, sometimes by catching them, but mostly by just leaving their scent. Thanks to the "Rat Patrol," rats are no longer camping out in the bicycle officers' equipment bags or scurrying across workers' desks.

Caregivers: not just cat ladies anymore

Roger Schuster didn't look like your typical feral cat caregiver. A former U.S. Army captain and helicopter pilot in Vietnam, the brawny Schuster, his wife, Frances, and their two sons moved from their southern California home to the small town of Glendale, Utah, seven years ago when Roger's health began to decline. They soon discovered two feral cats living on the property.

"He said they were some of the most beautiful cats he'd ever seen," Frances remembers. "He said they had to be a special breed."

Roger found out about the Best Friends Feral Cat Program, had the cats neutered, and was soon taking in more feral cats. He spread the word to his neighbors in Glendale, convincing them to take in feral cats and set up feeding stations. Roger made regular runs to Best Friends to pick up cat food to disperse to all the feral cat caregivers in the neighborhood.

"He got 45 people in Glendale to get on board and open up feeding stations," Kotter says. "He changed a lot of minds there about feral cats and the importance of feeding them and fixing them."

Roger died of cancer a year ago in May. Today, Frances and their 23-year-old son, Cameron, continue to care for Casper, Harry, Elizabeth, Andrew, Big Fuzzy and Goliath. These cats were socialized as kittens and are no longer afraid of people.

Feral cat caregivers come from all walks of life. They're veterans, waitresses, public officials and truck drivers. Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper's wife, Laureen, takes feral kittens into their home to socialize them before they're put up for adoption in Ottawa's shelters. Norm Carroll, a cattle rancher in the small town of Orderville, Utah, always had "mousers" on his spread. Then, a few years ago, he started taking in feral cats. It's not unusual to see a couple of the cats hop into the bed of his truck and ride out with him to feed the cows. Carroll is now a regular at Kotter's annual appreciation lunch for area caregivers.

Most feral cat caregivers, like the ones in this story, stumbled into the job after a chance meeting with feral cats. Most work full-time jobs. They don't expect anything in return for their kindness. They do it out of the goodness of their own hearts.

Feral cat caregivers come from all walks of life. They're veterans, waitresses, public officials and truck drivers.

"These people in the trenches are so amazing," Sizemore says.

Two years ago, Sizemore received a phone call from the family of the man she had met in that church parking lot some 17 years before. The man had died, they told her, and he had one last wish: that someone would continue to care for the cats. Thanks to some caring people, someone is. 🐾

For More Information

Every day, compassionate people across the country provide care to feral cats and follow the simple steps of trap/neuter/return. For more specifics on how to help feral cats, go to Alley Cat Allies' website (www.alleycat.org) or Neighborhood Cats (www.neighborhoodcats.org).

To find out more about the Feral Cat Database, visit www.feralcatdatabase.info.

Best Friends Feral Cat Calendar

Best Friends Animal Society will be offering a 2009 calendar featuring photographs of feral cats. Proceeds will benefit the National Feral Cat Initiative. To purchase a calendar, call Shelly Kotter at (435) 644-2001, ext. 4469.

A resounding 'no' to puppy mills

BEST FRIENDS HELPS PASS A RETAIL PET SALE BAN IN BEVERLY HILLS

THE CHANGE WAS A LONG TIME COMING. Best Friends' focus on fighting puppy mills from the consumer end began eight years ago with peaceful protests in front of one pet store in Beverly Hills, California. Since then, Best Friends' work on its puppy mill initiatives has helped create a sea change in many U.S. cities. More and more people don't want puppy mills to stock local pet stores. Recently, the work came full circle when Beverly Hills became the next city to say no to mill-bred pets — for good.

Best Friends worked with the city council and the city attorney's office on an ordinance, and when it was brought to the city council recently for a vote, it passed unanimously. Elizabeth Oreck, manager of Best Friends' puppy mill initiatives, says, "Now pet stores within Beverly Hills will not be allowed to sell dogs, cats or rabbits unless they come from shelters or rescue groups." The city joins more than 80 other municipalities throughout North America that have put a stop to selling milled pets.

Learn more about Best Friends' work to stop puppy mills:
bestfriends.org/**puppymills**

volunteer

Get involved.
Volunteer at our sanctuary or with one of Best Friends' local programs in Los Angeles, Salt Lake City or New York City. You can also help at one of our nationwide events or even from your home.
bestfriends.org/**volunteer**

What is this  worth to you?

Nowadays a penny doesn't buy much. But it's the price of this dog's life now that he's past his prime as a breeder in a puppy mill.

Sold for pocket change

by Cathy Scott

Editor's note: September is Puppy Mills Awareness Month. The following story highlights the vital work of Best Friends' Pup My Ride program, which transports discarded puppy mill dogs from dire circumstances to eagerly awaiting rescue groups on the East Coast.

The white cockapoo's auction number, 354, identified him as being born into a commercial dog kennel (a.k.a. puppy mill) in April 2008. Along with some 350 other dogs, he was being sold to the highest bidder.

As their numbers came up, each of the dogs was carried to a table in the middle of the auction room. Prospective bidders — mostly commercial dog kennel owners — sat nearby. It was the end of the day, and the bidding amounts per dog had dropped. "Who wants to pay a dollar for this one?" the auctioneer asked as he called out the number of the first of six dogs. "One dollar? Who wants to start at a dollar?"

The starting bids dropped even more. "Fifty cents?" the auctioneer asked as he called the number for another small dog. Some dogs that day sold for as little as two for a dime, another for pennies, as one by one they left the auction block with breeders for a life confined to yet another breeding kennel. Later, the auctioned dogs' puppies would be sent to pet stores, where they would supply the demand for purebred and "designer" puppies.

The significance of a puppy mill dog being sold for a dollar or less was not lost on Kelli Ohrtman, specialist for Best Friends' Puppies Aren't Products campaign, who was there that day. She recalls the auction house's busy concession stand. "Sodas cost a dollar, and a bag of chips was 50 cents," Ohrtman says. "Meanwhile, dogs were selling for 10 cents. Five dogs — or in some cases, 50 dogs — could have been bought for the price of a snack-size bag of chips."

Finally, it came down to number 354, one of the last on the table. Dirty, with matted white fur, the cockapoo stood still. "One cent," the auctioneer said, then, quickly, "One penny, one penny, do you want to take this dog for a penny?" When no one raised a hand, he said to a handler, "Put him back."

"Back" meant the holding area where the hundreds of dogs for that day's auction had waited to go on the auction block. When it was over, however, a few dogs remained in cages while a veterinarian stood by. When number 354 was carried to the back, the auctioneer looked out at the few remaining potential bidders and said, "We don't want to have to put these [unsold] dogs down, but that's what's going to happen. If anyone is willing to take these dogs, please come and talk to me." The bidding continued until all the dogs were either sold or whisked back to the holding area.

"This particular auction was not an isolated event," Ohrtman says. In fact, this same scenario plays out at weekend auctions held much of the year across the Midwest. Said Elizabeth Oreck, Best Friends' national campaign manager for Puppies Aren't Products, "Commercial breeders are manufacturing animals for an already over-saturated market, and the surplus have nowhere to go. Stopping dog auctions wouldn't stop breeders from engaging in these practices. Auctions are simply a window into the commercial dog-breeding industry."

It's time for a change, Ohrtman says. "What needs to change are the overcrowded kennels that have more dogs than they can care for, the kennels that can't meet USDA regulations and the ones who keep breeding more dogs even when their puppies aren't selling well. Those are the kennels that are the biggest problem and end up getting shut down, and their dogs end up at auction."

Bred for profit

An estimated 4,600 licensed commercial dog-breeding facilities exist in the U.S. and produce well over a million puppies annually, while roughly five million dogs and cats are killed each year in overpopulated shelters. A quarter of the animals in shelters are purebred dogs and cats.

Life in a commercial breeding facility, where puppies are bred for profit, is not easy. The dogs typically live in small, stackable wire cages, often crudely built with no protection from the elements. They have minimal contact with humans and little, if any, veterinary care. Many find themselves, like number 354, at a puppy mill, then at an auction house, then another puppy mill until they are too old or too sick to breed. "It's a really stark existence," Ohrtman says.

And although Best Friends does not buy dogs, offering a penny for a dog was the least she and Oreck could do. "We made an exception and paid 10 cents for 10 dogs. We simply couldn't walk away from those dogs, knowing that euthanasia was their only other option," Ohrtman says.

In the holding area, where the curly-headed number 354 was taken, a veterinarian was standing by to euthanize him along with the other remaining dogs, unless someone quickly stepped forward and offered to take them. "These dogs are the 'scraps' they can't sell at auction that get killed afterward," explains an independent rescuer who requested not to be named. "No one wants to buy them."

But at this particular auction, Oreck and Ohrtman stayed until the end when only the "scraps" like number 354 were left. Ten dogs — mostly cockapoos (cocker-spaniel/poodle mixes) and cockachons (cocker/Bichon-frise) — remained. Oreck reached into her purse and found pennies, placing them on the table as she counted them out, 10 cents in exchange for what Ohrtman calls "10 amazing, adoptable dogs."

A new life

Number 354 is now named Lincoln, for the copper penny it took to rescue him. Lincoln was included in the Pup My Ride transport program. The transport, which is part of Best Friends' Puppies Aren't Products campaign, takes retired breeding dogs to rescue groups on the East Coast, where small dogs are in demand.

Two other rescued dogs able to go on a transport were silky terrier girls — a mother, 10, and a daughter, 8 — who were purchased by a breeder at an earlier auction. But the breeder, after two months, no

Lincoln spends some time with volunteer Jana Morris.

longer wanted them. When she gave them to an independent rescuer, she said, "I don't know why I bought them. They're no-good breeders."

Two Brussels griffon boys also came from an auction house, selling to another breeder for $5 each. They were given to the independent rescuer because "the breeder decided she didn't like the puppy's looks, and the other male's back legs grew too long, so she got rid of them," the rescuer says. The five-month-old puppy and one-year-old dog also made it onto a Pup My Ride transport.

The more popular breeds, like schnorkies (shih tzu and Yorkshire terrier mixes), maltipoos (Maltese/poodle mixes) and teddy bears (Bichon frise mixes), are causing the market to be more crowded than it already is. "It's hard to keep up with the new breeds," the rescuer says. "You name it, the puppy mills have them. They're mutts, but breeders call them new breeds."

Jenny Gerritse, a board member for Hearts United for Animals sanctuary in Auburn, Nebraska, has seen commercial puppy farms downsize because of a demand for new breeds. "Breeders give up the dogs when the puppies aren't selling," says Gerritse. "Or they get rid of them if they're too big and they're not easy to sell."

While eight of the ten "penny dogs" that Best Friends acquired at the auction that day went to Pup My Ride receiving shelters on the East Coast, two came back to the Sanctuary in Utah. Included in the transport was Lincoln, who was in the auction's holding area with the other nine dogs when Best Friends staffer Angela Rovetto arrived to retrieve them.

"When we picked him up from the auction house, he was hunkered down, huddling in his cage, trying to hide from all the commotion," Rovetto says. But a few days after Lincoln left the auction house, the shy dog began to slowly come out of his shell. "He's doing much better. His personality is starting to show. He'll be fine."

What you can do to help

- Don't buy from a pet store
- Adopt from an animal shelter or rescue group (search for purebreds on Petfinder.com)
- Support Puppies Aren't Products and Pup My Ride on network.bestfriends.org
- Educate your friends and family about puppy mills and encourage them to adopt
- Contact local and state lawmakers about puppy mills and auction houses in your area

The myth of legal protections

By Dr. Frank McMillan, Best Friends director of well-being studies

Pet stores, breeders and all others involved in the business of large-scale puppy production routinely defend their practices by pointing out how the laws and government licensing assure that the dogs are treated humanely. Pet stores, for example, often tell their customers that they only obtain their puppies from "fully inspected licensed breeders." Sounds impressive. But how protected are the dogs?

An internal audit was recently released by the U.S. government detailing the failures of these laws and of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) enforcement of the laws. It erases any doubt as to how unprotected the dogs in puppy mills are. Here are the key findings of the report:

- The overall enforcement process was ineffective in achieving breeder compliance with the federal Animal Welfare Act and regulations, which are intended to ensure the humane care and treatment of animals. Some breeders simply ignored minimum care standards, which constitute the absolute lowest quality of care that can be considered humane.
- Typically, no enforcement action is taken against first-time violators, even if the inspector identifies a violation that has a high potential for harming the health or well-being of an animal. Serious violations (those that compromise animal health) and grave violations (those that directly harm animals) made up nearly 60 percent of all violations from October 2006 to April 2008.
- Examples of violations that the auditors noted include lack of adequate veterinary care for ill animals, contaminated food, feces and urine pooled under the kennels, and starving dogs.
- Of 4,250 breeders who violated the law, over half had done so multiple times. Yet even though the USDA guide requires the inspectors to take enforcement action for repeat violators, in more than half of the cases no action was taken. In addition, to be labeled a repeat violator, the breeder must repeat the exact same violation. If the breeder commits a different violation on every inspection, he or she will not be considered a repeat violator, no matter how long this goes on or how serious the violations.
- Six of 19 inspectors did not correctly report all repeat or direct violations (those that are generally more serious and affect the animals' health), thus undermining enforcement efforts.
- A provision in the law requires that violators be given a final opportunity to take corrective action before confiscation of any dog can occur, even in extreme cases where the inspector sees dogs clearly suffering or dying.
- The USDA continues to levy minimal penalties for violations, which results in monetary penalties too low to deter violators. The penalties for wholesaling without a license were so low that in some cases the penalty was less than the license fees, in which case the violator has a financial advantage by not being licensed.
- Large breeders who sell dogs to individuals over the Internet are not covered by the federal law and are not inspected. In April 2009, the U.S. government publicly acknowledged that not requiring Internet breeders to be licensed and inspected is "a massive loophole."

In short, until the situation changes, the laws, regulations, enforcement, penalties, and the designation of "licensed and inspected" are all virtually meaningless. To read the full report, go to www.usda.gov/oig/webdocs/33002-4-SF.pdf.

Inside Campaigns

Photo credit: Robert Todd Williamson

Puppies Aren't Products

Spoken from the heart

Twilight actor Rachelle Lefevre passionately assumes her new role as a spokesperson for our Puppies Aren't Products campaign.

By Ted Brewer

For film and television actor Rachelle Lefevre, the experience of adopting her dog Honey was what made animal rescue such a profoundly personal endeavor, an endeavor she has committed to as a new spokesperson for Best Friends' Puppies Aren't Products campaign, which encourages people to adopt rather than purchase dogs from puppy-mill-supplied pet stores.

The image of her Maltese poodle mix stands in her mind, she says, as the constant reminder for why people should always adopt, and never buy from a pet store.

"The thought keeps plaguing me — that if we hadn't adopted Honey, she might have been euthanized," she explains.

Lefevre is best known for her role as Victoria in the 2008 blockbuster *Twilight*, a role she reprises in the recently released sequel, *New Moon*. Lefevre also plays opposite Kevin Spacey in 2010's *Casino Jack* and opposite Paul Giamatti in *Barney's Version*, also due out next year.

Lefevre has taken to her position as a Best Friends spokesperson with fervor, describing the position as a "perfect match" for what she knows and believes in.

"Without even thinking about it, I've become the person who always says to anyone even thinking of getting a dog, 'You better not buy,'" she says, laughing.

Road to rescue

One of Lefevre's first experiences with rescuing animals occurred when she was growing up in Montreal, Quebec. Her mother, a psychologist, had a client who one day showed up to his appointment holding a white Lhasa apso. The client had found the dog running loose, knowing the dog belonged to a home of drug addicts who had severely neglected her. The client, wanting a better life for the dog, hoped that Lefevre's mother would take her. She did, and the family named her Charlie.

"She was an absolute mess when we got her," Lefevre remembers. "But she was the sweetest dog and became the family pet."

With that experience, Lefevre was receptive to learning about animal rescue when she met Loverboy, a Rottweiler her manager, Pearl Hanan, had adopted.

Someone had dumped Loverboy in Hanan's backyard. Hanan took him in to live with her and her chocolate Labrador, Riley. Before meeting Loverboy, Lefevre was under the common misconception that a rescued dog the size and breed of Loverboy would be less than friendly. Lefevre instead found him irresistible, and the two forged a bond that marked a turning point in her thinking and her approach to animal rescue. All breeds, even those with stigmatized reputations, could be "the sweetest, most caring, gentle dogs."

A Best Friends member since 1993, Hanan gives each of her clients a membership to Best Friends every year as a Christmas gift. ("It's my favorite group … ever," Hanan says.)

For about as long as she's been a member, Hanan has also been rescuing

pit bulls. She wound up adopting one of them, a puppy named Sugar. Sugar had no social skills when Hanan brought her home, and Lefevre witnessed Hanan working with the pit bull and helping her to finally learn those skills. "I think Rachelle got an education in how to rescue dogs then," Hanan says.

"Pearl had rescued Sugar and turned her into the most loveable dog," Lefevre says. "And she told me that Best Friends does the same thing, but on a much more massive scale.… That whole experience made me want to get involved."

She and her boyfriend, Jamie Thomas King, would later adopt Honey, who had been in an East Los Angeles shelter. And Lefevre would also become a passionate supporter of Best Friends, primarily from reading the animal profiles in this magazine. From the profiles, she has embraced the Best Friends approach to animal welfare.

As a spokesperson for the Puppies Aren't Products campaign, Lefevre appeared in 30-second and 60-second public service announcements sent out to 1,400 television and cable stations in time for the holiday season, a crucial time of year for homeless dogs. The PSA sent a message — "Adopt, don't shop" — to holiday shoppers thinking of getting puppies as Christmas presents. Coupled with the PSAs, New York City's buses sported signs with Lefevre's photo and the message: "Let a shelter dog steal your heart. Adopt. Don't shop."

"We are thrilled to have Rachelle on board helping us educate the public about puppy mills," says Kelli Ohrtman, Puppies Aren't Products campaign specialist. "There are still so many people who aren't aware of where the cute puppies in the pet stores are coming from, and Rachelle, with her legion of fans, can help us reach those people and weaken the demand for dogs born in puppy mills."

To learn more about our Puppies Aren't Products campaign, visit puppiesarentproducts.com.

Photo credit: Robert Todd Williamson

In addition to the PSAs, city buses are decorated with the "Adopt, don't shop" message.

Puppies Aren't Products

Article leads to activism

By Cathy Scott

KB Sisco is on a mission: She volunteers in Las Vegas, educating people about pet store puppies and where they come from. She wants to educate others because she learned the hard way. "I had no idea about commercial breeders and how the dogs are treated," Sisco says. "I am a person who has purchased a dog from a pet store because of ignorance."

After she read an article in *Best Friends* magazine about what she describes as "the horrors of commercial breeding," she vowed to make a difference. She wants to make sure others don't make the same mistake she did by getting a puppy at a store.

"I read an article on Amish puppy mills, and from that point on, I have wanted to help the dogs suffering in these mills," she says. She learned that at commercial breeding farms, dogs are kept in cages and are treated more like livestock than pets. Their sole purpose is to make a profit for breeders.

Enlightened, she plowed head first into volunteer work, helping to adopt out Best Friends dogs at mobile adoption events in the Las Vegas Valley. Today, Sisco's mantra is "Adopt, don't shop," which is printed on the signs she carries when she volunteers during peaceful demonstrations held near puppy stores. The demonstrations, which take place on public sidewalks, are one component of Best Friends' Puppies Aren't Products campaign.

At adoption events, she spends time with pups who were once mill dogs. "During mobile adoptions, you have a great opportunity to talk about each dog and how they ended up at Best Friends," she says. "Loving on former puppy mill dogs and making sure they know we care for them is so important." And the dogs return the affection. "The unconditional love they give inspires me. It helps me remember to stay focused on what is important, knowing I can play a part in changing the life of a loving dog," she says.

Sisco and her fellow volunteers have not felt alone in their mission to inform people about the plight of dogs living out their lives as breeders to supply the pet store demand for puppies. "Because we're all so genuinely passionate, it's easy to share our story," Sisco says. "The community support we receive is awesome. I know that we've changed the minds of people."

Charlotte with her best friend Oliver the cat

Uncovering the truth

BEST FRIENDS EXPERT DEBUNKS COMMON MYTHS ABOUT AMERICA'S FAVORITE DOG

MYTHS MIGHT SEEM HARMLESS, and they often can be. However, myths about pit bull terriers are anything but harmless. In fact, they can mean the difference between life and death. Best Friends legislative attorney Lee Greenwood says, "When people believe myths about any dog breed, it leads to all sorts of problems. They don't get adopted from shelters, and lawmakers pass bad laws that discriminate against dogs who even look like them." But there's good news, too.

Truth be told, no breed of dog is bad or dangerous, and pit bull terriers are just like every other dog. Here, Lee addresses some of the most common myths about America's dog, the pit bull terrier. Consider it a crash course that can have a real impact on these often-misunderstood pets.

Whether you already know and love a pit bull terrier or haven't had the pleasure of meeting one yet, knowing — and sharing — the truth about them will help save lives. And that's no myth.

PIT BULL TERRIER MYTHS VS. TRUTHS

MYTH: *PIT BULL TERRIERS ARE MORE AGGRESSIVE THAN OTHER DOGS.*

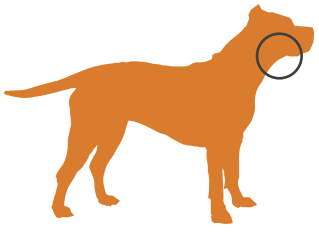
THE TRUTH: The American Temperament Test Society, which provides a uniform national program of temperament testing for dogs, has found that pit-bull-terrier-like dogs passed the test at a higher rate than many other dog breeds, such as golden retrievers and border collies. Some people think these dogs are somehow physiologically and genetically different from other dogs, but they aren't.

MYTH: *IT'S EASY TO IDENTIFY A DOG'S BREED BY LOOKING AT HIM OR HER.*

THE TRUTH: It's been shown that almost 90 percent of shelter dogs visually identified as a particular breed are mislabeled. This misidentification becomes a huge problem when municipalities pass laws and ordinances that contain provisions discriminating against dogs of certain breeds, such as pit bull terriers. The laws end up adversely affecting not only dogs of the targeted breeds, but many other dogs who simply look like them.

MYTH: *PIT BULLS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BITE THAN OTHER BREEDS.*

THE TRUTH: A peer-reviewed study found that nearly 85 percent of dog bite fatalities were from unneutered dogs, and the co-occurring factors that led to bites were things like lack of socialization and positive interactions with people and animals, abuse or neglect, and tethering for long periods of time. Breed had nothing to do with it.



MYTH: *PIT BULL TERRIERS HAVE LOCKING JAWS THAT MAKE THEIR BITES MORE DANGEROUS.*

THE TRUTH: Pit bull terriers are physiologically no different from any other dog out there. There are no locking jaws; that characteristic simply doesn't exist.

MYTH: *PIT BULL TERRIERS ARE NOT FAMILY DOGS. ONLY BAD PEOPLE HAVE THEM.*

THE TRUTH: According to Vetstreet.com, the American pit bull terrier is one of the top three favorite breeds in 28 states. So, the idea that they're reserved for certain types of people is false. There are millions of these dogs in our country, and they're family pets, therapy dogs and service animals, just like other dogs. Any kind of dog can make a great pet.

Read the full interview with Lee Greenwood for more pit bull myth busters, and learn more about the history of pit bull terriers, legislative activity affecting dogs and much more: bestfriends.org/pitbullmyths

And be sure to sign up for Best Friends legislative alerts to ensure that pets in your community are protected. Learn more: bestfriends.org/action