

# Coffee Break



## What signs of progress have you seen since you entered the animal welfare field?

That was the question we asked you for this issue's Coffee Break. In your answers, you spoke of increased public awareness, growing resource levels, passage of animal-friendly legislation, and more.

From intake to animal care to adoptions, great improvements have been made. I believe the progress has been made possible by improved communications among shelter staff, rescue groups, volunteers, and the public. Our enhanced ability to communicate with one another through the Internet, conferences, and publications has allowed us to learn and apply best practices at a much faster rate than we could have done 20 years ago. Being able to share information more effectively has allowed all of us in shelters to maximize our potential for growth, change, and progress.

—Barbara S. Carr, Executive Director, SPCA Serving Erie County, Tonawanda, New York

I walk through the Sacramento SPCA's new 20,000-square-foot adoption building and have to move out of the way as volunteers begin the daily morning ritual of walking the dogs available for adoption. Handsome, gray-faced Milo, a 10-year-old black Lab, seemingly skips past me on his way outside. He is followed by Tilda, a 9-year-old Chesapeake Bay retriever, and Rocky, an 8-year-old rottweiler mix. Cinnamon, an 11-year-old terrier, is scampering to catch up. In 1975, these dogs would have had no chance at all, but now, their prospects are good. More "senior" animals are adopted each year. In

2006, more than 800 older dogs and cats were placed in new loving homes at the Sacramento SPCA alone. We have come a long way in 30-plus years—and, for dogs like Milo, Tilda, Rocky, and Cinnamon, the change is literally a lifetime.

—Rick Johnson, Executive Director, Sacramento SPCA, Sacramento, California

Public awareness of the challenges shelters face and the role sterilization plays in dealing with pet overpopulation has certainly increased since I began working at the Capital Humane Society. There is also greater awareness about adopting. Resources available to shelters have also increased. The ability to seek out "how-to" information is a hundred times better than it was when I first entered this field. The Society of Animal Welfare Administrators, The HSUS, the ASPCA, American Humane, and others have contributed to this effort. Financial assistance through corporate foundations and assistance in times of disaster were not around when I started. Legislation introduced and passed today wouldn't have had a chance at success 24 years ago. These are just a few of the changes I have seen. While change comes slower than we might like it to, society does evolve, and the efforts people are making today will continue to change the face of our field.

—Robert A. Downey, Executive Director, Capital Humane Society, Lincoln, Nebraska

Signs of progress are everywhere. We are no longer working in "pounds" and viewed as crazy animal lovers. Our issues are far more mainstream and discussed regularly in the media. Our animal companions are viewed as family members. Veterinary medicine has advanced tremendously, and regular veterinary care is an assumed responsibility. Dogs are more apt to be walked on a leash, cats to wear collars and licenses/identification. There is more awareness of and less tolerance for neglect and cruel treatment of animals. The links between child abuse, domestic violence, and animal cruelty are

well established and understood. In many areas of the country, spaying and neutering of dogs is so effective that we are now transporting animals to prevent euthanasia at another shelter or in a distant community. Cats have replaced dogs as man's best friend, and their status legally, as well as in our shelters and communities, continues to increase. We run far more professional not-for-profit organizations, we are respected community leaders, and we collaborate to solve problems. The Internet makes the animal world much smaller. Things are not perfect yet for animals, but they are certainly much better than when I was a young pup.

—M. Christie Smith, CAWA, Executive Director, Potter League for Animals, Middletown, Rhode Island

The biggest stride in the area of Texas where I lived until recently has been the huge leap in cooperation among shelters and animal rescue groups. The groups have done well enough that shelters now e-mail their lists of animals in need and call some breed rescue groups because they can trust most of them to follow through. Having partners in the community certainly helps us all.

—Carolle Cox, Volunteer, Japanese Chin Care and Rescue Effort (JCCARE), Frederick, Maryland

In the last 30 years, tremendous progress has been made in the protection of animals. Today, widely accepted practices in the sheltering world include early sterilization, humane euthanasia, psychological/social enrichment of shelter pets, and standardized training for staff. These were distant goals three decades ago. I entered the animal sheltering world in 1980, when decompression and carbon monoxide chambers were the standard for euthanasia; when shelters were reluctant to sterilize companion animals, rationalizing the "cost" would deter adoptions; when cruelty statutes and convictions were either nonexistent or "lightweight." Perhaps the most progress related to animal protec-

tion has been in the validation of "pets" as companions and the measurable connection between human and animal violence. What progress will there be in the next 30 years? Let's hope we will no longer need to house unwanted animals and that our focus and programs will exist only to enhance the bond between pets and their people. In 30 years, I'll bet that new people to the profession will ask, "What's a puppy mill?"

—Joan Carlson Radabaugh, Executive Director/CEO, Humane Society of the Palm Beaches, West Palm Beach, Florida

When I started, our cinderblock kennels were in good shape, our donor records were kept on index cards, and when we mentioned the phrase "spay and neuter" to people, we often saw blank or confused stares. In looking back over 23 years, I am encouraged about how much has changed for the betterment of animals and their welfare. I base my optimism on four key trends: the public is more aware of spaying and neutering; the number of women in leadership positions has increased; technological advances have had a positive impact in our humane work; and new shelters are being designed as community or learning centers that are attractive to the public and include more humane environments for both animals and people. Although our work is not finished, let us not forget how far we have progressed. As writer Robert Heinlein warns, "A generation which ignores history has no past and no future."

—Nancy B. McKenney, MNPL, CAWA, Executive Director, Petfinder.com Foundation, and Director, Petfinder.com, Renton, Washington

**Animal Sheltering congratulates Carolle Cox of Frederick, Maryland, whose submission was selected in a random drawing from those published in this issue. Japanese Chin Care and Rescue Effort (JCCARE), for which she volunteers, will receive a free coffee break: a \$50 gift certificate to a local coffee shop. "Bone" appetit!**

## Our next question: What is the silliest question you've received from the public?

Please submit your responses (150 words or less) at [animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak](http://animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak) or send them to Editor, *Animal Sheltering*/HSUS, 2100 L St. NW, Washington, DC 20037. **Your answer may be printed in a future issue of *Animal Sheltering*.** If your response is chosen for publication, you will be entered into a drawing to win a **free coffee break (valued at \$50)** for your organization. No donation or purchase is necessary to win; see [animalsheltering.org](http://animalsheltering.org) for contest rules, or send an e-mail or letter to the above addresses to request a printed copy.