



The Pet Rescue Foundation

AN INTERVIEW WITH JANE HOFFMAN

President and Chair of the Board, Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals

Q. Jane you're the President of the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals and you're also a practicing attorney. How did these paths intersect?

A. Well, in my "day job" my practice focuses on Executive Compensation-employment contracts, severance agreements, etc. - and Estate Planning-drafting wills and trusts, etc.

I'm also a Founding Member of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York Committee on Legal Issues Pertaining to Animals. The Animal Law Committee (as we call it because the name is too impossibly long!) was founded in 1990.

The Animal Law Committee is one of 131 committees of the New York City Bar Association. The Committee is part of a "Protected Classes Cluster" of committees. The Protected Classes Cluster includes Civil Rights, Immigration & Nationality Law, Labor & Employment Law, Legal Issues Affecting People with Disabilities, Legal Problems of the Aging, Project on the Homeless, Sex & the Law and Social Welfare Law.

I've always loved animals and giving back to the community has always been important to me. When I got involved in animal issues through the Animal Law Committee, I felt I had found a way to combine both. It's not often you feel you might be able to make a difference in an area that is your passion.

Q. What does the Animal Law Committee do?

A. The Committee sponsors annual *Animals and the Law* conferences. We also sponsor evening programs that are open to the public on areas of interest such as Humane Education, Pets in Housing, Animal Abuse and the violence connection. The Committee comments on and drafts legislation on the local, state and federal level. Finally, we write brochures such as "Keeping Spot and Fluffy Home: Companion Animals in NYC Housing," "Animal Fighting and Cruelty Cases in New York State: A Guide for Judges and Prosecutors and Defense Attorneys," "Access Rights of People with Disabilities and their Service Animals" and "Providing for Your Pet in the Event of Your Death or Hospitalization".

In 2000 the topic of the Annual Conference was on "Cats, Dogs and Public Policy." I moderated the conference along with one of my fellow Committee members. Richard Avanzino was one of the speakers at that Conference along with a host of leading lights

in the field. In the course of planning that conference we learned a tremendous amount about homeless animals in New York and around the country.

When Mayor Bloomberg was elected to office, the New York City Bar Association asked if the Animal Law Committee wanted to send a report to the Mayor's Transition Team on the numerous untapped opportunities that existed in New York City to improve policies

regarding animals – changes that would also have the potential to reap enormous benefits for the City. The Committee jumped at the chance.

Q. Was the Mayor's office receptive?

A. Yes. Our report covered several topics but the one that resonated with the Mayor's Office was the section on animal care and control.

The Office of Operations called and invited us to meet with them to discuss our report in greater detail. Several more meetings followed. We went with a three-inch thick binder of background information complete with dossiers on innovative leaders and programs nationwide in the animal sheltering community and city resources that might be helpful to saving more lives -- all of this was so the City could see that we wouldn't have to reinvent the wheel. To their credit, they totally got behind our suggestions.

Once it became clear that the City was seriously committed to this and that the leading shelters and rescue groups were on board, it was clear that the Animal Law Committee's work was done and the Mayor's Alliance for NYC Animals was just beginning.

I agreed to be President and Chair of the Board of the Mayor's Alliance. I currently work out of my law office. My motto is "lean and mean." I want whatever money we raise or resources we get to go first and foremost to the animal groups who are doing the work in the trenches. Currently, the work of the Alliance is done by several volunteers who work in the following areas: budget/finance, fundraising, media relations and of course most important - preparing a Maddie's Fund grant application.

To accomplish our goal to make New York a no-kill city (saving all the healthy and treatable animals) by the year 2008 and to better utilize the resources being offered to the Mayor's Alliance, we hope to open a small office and hire a handful of key people in the next few months - funding permitting.

Q. What has your relationship with the City been like since that initial meeting?

A. The New York City Bar Association has tremendous credibility, which was extremely helpful in the first instance. In addition, this Administration is very interested in public/private partnerships that can bring innovative, creative solutions to bear on city problems. This Mayor just wants to get things done.

In December 2002, City Hall and the Mayor's Alliance signed a historic **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**. The goal is to create a no-kill city by the year 2008.

As part of the MOU, the City committed to providing non-financial resources such as access to parks, parking permits for adoption vans and ads in subways, trains and buses to the Mayor's Alliance to help its member organizations increase the adoption of cats and dogs.

As a result of the MOU, channels of communication between the Mayor's Alliance, City Hall and the various city agencies have been created. Rather than wait for formal meetings, I normally just pick up the phone and call the Health Department, Parks Department or whoever I need to speak to and they feel free to contact me.

With these resources, the Mayor's Alliance hopes to increase public awareness about the need to adopt cats and dogs from a local shelter or rescue group and to spay and neuter - thereby reducing the killing. It should be unacceptable to all New Yorkers that healthy cats and dogs are killed in NYC shelters simply because there are not enough homes for them.

A separate agreement between Animal Care and Control (CACC) and the Mayor's Alliance was signed to establish an operational protocol for how CACC would work with animal rescue groups and other shelters. There was a complete meeting of the minds on this. As a result, more rescue groups are taking animals out of City shelters and volunteers are being allowed back in the City shelters, in some cases for the first time in many years. We are all delighted to be developing a working relationship that will be a win-win situation for all parties, especially for NYC's cats and dogs.

Q. What specifically does the Mayor's Alliance do?

A. The Mayor's Alliance acts as a liaison between the city government and the animal rescue community. We work with the Mayor's Office and other city departments. We serve as an umbrella organization for animal shelters and rescue groups that want to work together to save lives. And we are partnering with the Veterinary Medical Association of New York City to submit a Maddie's Fund grant application.

The Mayor's Alliance coordinates adoption events by working with the Parks Department and the Department of Transportation. We are also developing advertising campaigns, media relations, working on placing PSAs, and attempting to cultivate new sources for fundraising. And we are working with authors and publishers to try to get bookstores and libraries to host cat adoptions days - maybe in conjunction with a book signing and reading.

The Mayor's Alliance is also helping to build the infrastructure of its participating animal shelters and rescue groups by providing training and resources. We want to help the shelters and groups increase their own fundraising ability and give them tools to help

increase their adoptions. We want to help them do what they are already doing only better!

Our website, www.animalallianceny.org serves as an information center where people can find out about our activities and the activities of the individual Mayor's Alliance members.

Our first Manhattan adoption event took place last summer at the Central Park Naumann Band Shell. Central Park happens to be premier real estate in the City. The Mayor's Alliance Central Park event was co-hosted by the ASPCA

Our first Brooklyn adoption event was in Brooklyn's premier park - Prospect Park – right near “dog beach.” That adoption event was co-hosted by Brooklyn Animal Resource Coalition (BARC) Animal Shelter. In the future, we plan to have at least five major “events” each year: one in each of the “premier parks” in each of the five Boroughs: Queens, Staten Island, the Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan. These events will be co-hosted by an animal rescue group or shelter from that borough.

We also plan to have ongoing regular adoption “sites” in smaller city parks where local groups can set up every weekend and the neighborhood knows where they can go to adopt a new family member.

The Mayor's Alliance meets as a group when we have important information to share or something substantive to offer. At our next meeting, we're having a session on “Looking Good, Making an Impression and Increasing Your Adoptions.” We will be passing out the Mayor's Alliance Standard Operating Manual with lots of resource information and 300 donated orange mesh dog capes that have bright yellow patches on the shoulders with black letters reading “ADOPT ME.” We want the rescue groups to have their dogs wear the “ADOPT ME” capes at adoption events, at the regular adoption sites and while they are walking them in their neighborhoods to build awareness that these great dogs need homes.

Two volunteers-one who managed, developed and designed retail shopping centers, and another who is tops in the area of visual merchandising and display, volunteered to conduct the training on best practices and marketing techniques.

Q. So how many animal groups participate in the Mayor's Alliance?

A. There are six founders, primarily the brick and mortar shelters in NY, a rescue group and a funding organization: the ASPCA, Animal Haven, BARC, City Critters, the Humane Society of New York and Art for Animals. Over 35 groups currently belong to the Alliance. We are very pleased that ten of our member groups are breed rescue groups. A full listing (alphabetically and by borough) is on our website at www.animalallianceny.org.

Q. How do you balance the interests of all the groups in your coalition?

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There has not been a history of cooperation among the animal groups in New York. As with the City, the fact that the New York City Bar Association was behind the Mayor's Alliance provided a great deal of immediate credibility – probably more than if any one animal organization tried to do this.

We balance the interests of all the groups by keeping the focus very narrow. We want to reduce and then end the killing of cats and dogs in shelters by increasing adoptions and increasing spay/neuter surgeries. PERIOD. The Mayor's Alliance does not take positions on other issues. We require that no Alliance member ever purport to speak on behalf of the Alliance although they are free to speak and lobby on other issues in their own name. Finally, there is no trash talking. We are a team on a difficult mission- we do not have time or room for infighting.

We were pleasantly surprised by everyone's willingness to participate and cooperate. For example, Animal Haven donated seed money to the Mayor's Alliance that came from a grant they got from Best Friends Animal Sanctuary. The ASPCA gave the Mayor's Alliance a \$22,000 grant for direct costs incurred by Alliance members associated with participating in adoption events. Thanks to this grant, the Mayor's Alliance can ask all the groups to develop a consistent look to their events, with nice tented displays, banners with names and logos, tables and tablecloths so every group can present well to the public and we can all have identifying items that indicate participation in the Mayor's Alliance.

Q. How have the groups responded to you, personally?

A. It's been great. It's actually a plus that I'm not from an animal rescue group or shelter. I'm not competition.

I came from Wall Street where I did deals. I was also a management consultant for a number of years. I consider all of these rescue groups and shelters to be my clients and I'm trying to do the best for all of them. I don't have a reason to favor one organization over another. This has created a certain level of trust. As a lawyer and a management consultant, I was trained to come into a situation, evaluate it and come up with a solution. People understand this is why I'm here.

Q. The groups are working together, the City is on board. Why is this all coming together now?

A. I think there are a lot of factors at play. The no-kill movement is gaining momentum. The hope of working with Maddie's Fund is a big incentive--having a few single minded goals makes sense. I think we're in the right place at the right time with the right solutions.

Q. Is it harder or easier to achieve the goal because this is New York.

A. It is both harder and easier.

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On the positive side, there is a tremendous amount of energy and talent here as well as a lot of rescue groups and shelters already doing great work.

On the other hand, NYC is in the midst of a terrible budget crunch. Money that might have been available for animals isn't. There are a lot of other matters the city has to address. And funding for charities in general across the board has decreased.

But by and large, New Yorkers feel we have to be able to do this. It's an embarrassment that we haven't solved the problem of homeless animals and other communities and cities have. The realization that this is an achievable goal has lit a fire and a lot of people who see that there are solutions are very anxious to help. New York has many of the best and brightest and a lot of them are coming forward now to donate their time, their talent, their hearts and their caring.

There is a lot of pent up interest and excitement in the City as a whole and now that there's an outlet for it, animal lovers are coming out in droves and coming together.

We're finding incredible professional volunteers offering to help—people with years of experience in media placement, PR firms, and law firms. —people at really high levels in their fields. They're willing to help in their area of expertise or do hands-on work. At this point, we can't schedule enough events to keep all of the volunteers busy. We can't assign tasks fast enough to keep up with all of the volunteer enthusiasm. There is so much momentum now. I really don't see how we can fail.

Q. What's been the biggest surprise to you over the past several months?

A. The level of enthusiasm. New Yorkers can be jaded. And activists had been rightfully yelling about how bad things were for so long but seemed unable to come up with workable solutions. And the City was closed off to any offers of help.

However, when the rescue groups and shelters and all the people who cared realized the Mayor's Alliance was genuine, that it had no ax to grind, was not part of past history and only wanted to help all the rescue groups and shelters succeed, they committed to the mission 100%.

In a way I was surprised at how quickly people came to the table but I probably should not have been, because at the end of the day all that these rescue groups and shelters want to do is get the cats and dogs out of the shelters and into loving homes. They want to save lives.