Friday, May 4, Sutton (Flatwoods exit I-79)

Animal Cruelty & Fighting Investigators Workshop

This valuable workshop - available only to prosecutors, law enforcement agents, animal control officers, and anyone involved in animal cruelty investigations - is being offered in order to strengthen animal cruelty and fighting convictions in communities throughout West Virginia.

Produced by The Humane Society of the United States and presented by Franklin County Sheriff’s Office (OH) Sergeant David Hunt, the training covers topics such as:

• preparing for court for animal cruelty and fighting cases,
• obtaining arrest warrants and preparing cases for prosecution,
• familiarizing with West Virginia state laws, and
• dealing with the media.

The need for this workshop became evident after Calhoun County Sheriff’s Department discovered 26 pit bull-type dogs in the yard of a deceased resident’s home in December 2010. The find soon led to the first felony arrest in West Virginia for dog-fighting.

The law making dog-fighting a felony passed in 2004; and yet, our law enforcement and animal control agencies are not prepared for the investigation or prosecution of those that are involved in animal-fighting.

This workshop develops investigative tools required for successfully interrupting the criminal behavior that leads to the suffering of innocent animals due to the actions of some individuals.

Studies have verified that animal cruelty is closely linked to domestic violence and other acts of violence. Dog-fighting arrests from around the country are always connected to other illegal activities such as illegal gambling, possession of controlled substances, illegal weapons, increased gang activity, and more.

FOHO WV is pleased to offer this workshop as part of its 2012 Animal Conference. Registrants will receive a wealth of information as well as the opportunity to enhance their skills in providing community safety and obtain training credit.


Location: Flatwoods Days Hotel & Conference Center in Sutton from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Workshop is limited to those directly involved in cruelty investigations. Seven hours of annual in-service credit will be offered to eligible law officers.
2012
FOHO WV

Conference on Animals

When: Saturday, May 5
Where: Days Hotel Conference Center, Sutton, WV
(Flatwoods exit I-79)

Who will attend: Shelter directors, humane society volunteers, animal control officers, humane officers, law enforcement officials, rescue coordinators, vet techs, and anyone who wants to network with others in the Animal Welfare Community.

What we’ll do: Our first morning session will offer a WV Animal Law Round Table with an informed panel discussing new animal law, inclusive of existing animal cruelty code and other applicable animal laws. More focus on working with our state laws and dealing with the media in cruelty cases will be explored. Our late morning session will explain WV Spay/Neuter Initiatives. Our afternoon sessions will cover topics of grant writing; creating a kid’s day camp focused on responsible pet care; the inside track on Greyhound racing; winning support for animal welfare from non-traditional sources; rescuing, rehabilitating, and marketing forgotten felines; and exploring our relationship and responsibility to nonhuman animals.

Attendees will receive a continental breakfast, lunch buffet, morning and afternoon snacks, great prizes, a revised WV Animal Law Book, and conference handouts. Registration is $55 and must be received by April 27. Go to www.fohowv.org to register.

$250 Survey Drawing Contest: We will add your shelter into a drawing for $250 for your facility! Winner will be selected at the State Conference. You do not have to be present to win. Survey at www.fohowv.org.

Conference co-sponsors: ASPCA, Help for Animals, Petco, Petfinder, HSUS, Animal Lifeline, FOHO WV, and SNAP WV
From the desk of  
FOHO WV President, Betty Burkett

It has been a busy time for FOHO and will get even busier. There are many things in this issue of our e-newsletter that are important for you to read about.

We have had a very interesting legislative session with the campaign to obtain funding for financial assistance to spay and neuter pets of low-income WV citizens.

WV is not the only state working on this issue. The state of Washington has also been involved in the same thing for several years. There were several bills introduced this year on animal issues. I really think things are changing with the true consideration of these kinds of bills in the legislature.

One of the bills that passed was the Exotic Bill, which will regulate the ownership of exotic animals. After the tragic events in Ohio, for once we are being pro-active instead of re-active for our state. Details must be worked out yet for this bill.

Be sure to check out the information on the Animal Conference on the website. May 4-5 will be here before you know it. Talk it up with your friends and family. We want to see YOU there.

Come and join with other people in the same business and with the same love of animals as yourself. There is nothing like being among all these people who have the same feelings about animals that you do. I won’t attempt to list everything that will be presented at the conference here.

You will have some tough decisions to make in what workshops you want to attend. We have made it easier to register and pay this year with the addition of the PayPal button on our website.

Also, read about who our sponsors are this year. We are extremely proud that these groups have such confidence in us that they are willing to give us this support and have their names associated with ours. Be sure to seek them out and give them your thanks. We truly cannot do conferences without this support.

$250 Survey Drawing Contest - We once again have a very important shelter survey for you to take. We will add your shelter into a drawing for $250 for your facility! Winner will be selected at the State Conference. You do not have to be present to win. Take the survey at www.fohowv.org.

Statistics can be boring but they can also be very exciting and they are really very important for proving to others how important the things we want to accomplish are, not only for the animals but for WV too.

Read, enjoy, and see you at the conference.

Little Bits

Tax help for animal foster homes?

According to a news article (http://m.examiner.com/animal-welfare-in-philadelphia/great-news-for-animal-foster-parents-have-you-heard-about-this), animal foster home providers can get some help on their taxes.

In a recent case, a judge ruled that a percentage of the plaintiff’s bills for litter, food, vet bills, cleaning supplies, etc., were tax deductible because she fostered for a charitable organization. Because everyone’s situation is different, make sure you check with your tax consultant before you automatically take deductions. Make sure you have documentation to back up your claim. The deductions are for fostered animals only, not owned animals.

AAWV anniversary in May

Animal Advocates of West Virginia (www.animaladvocateswv.com) will celebrate its second anniversary on Saturday, May 5, at Poor House Farm Park, in Martinsburg, WV, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The organization’s mission is to protect animals and promote the humane care and treatment of them through education and advocacy. As an ad hoc grassroots work group, AAWV serves as a citizens’ model for other groups in the state that want to improve the lives of animals in their communities.

The event will feature a silent auction, prize drawings, awards, demonstrations, animals for adoption, and special guests.

2012 FOHO WV Conference on Animals

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New FOHO WV Board Members

Mary Ann McDonald is a recently retired teacher who lives in Elkins with her husband, Brian, and their five shelter dogs. She has served as president and is currently a board member of the Randolph County Humane Society. Her husband designed and built the society’s new animal shelter’s dog building.

Mary Ann has worked with Theresa Bruner and the Elkins City Council to help pass a dog ordinance which helps to establish standards of care for dogs that are within the Elkins city limits. She has begun lobbying her legislators to help improve animal welfare in this state and has helped her local shelter receive state funds. Interested in the enforcement of existing animal laws, she has attended a trial regarding an animal abuse case in magistrate court, which resulted in a conviction. She and Theresa Bruner helped to distribute WV Animal Welfare Law books to local law enforcement officers in Randolph County and have worked with the prosecuting attorney’s office to ensure that animal abuse cases are prosecuted.

Mary Ann believes strongly that fostering partnerships and communication among elected officials, law enforcement officers, and citizens is the key to proper enforcement of animal welfare laws.

Melissa Lilly was born in southern West Virginia and earned her B.S. degree in Legal Studies from Mountain State University in Beckley. Melissa (or Missy as most people know her) attended WVU College of Law where she earned her JD in May 2011. While attending WVU College of Law, Missy served as president of the Student Animal Legal Defense Fund (SALDF) for two years. Missy is currently an attorney with the Beckley office of Farmer, Cline and Campbell, where she practices personal injury and social security law.

Missy has always been an animal lover and has always dreamed of a career in which she can better the lives of animals. Missy has been a member of several local and national animal organizations and has attended various conferences. In 2009, Missy attended The Humane Society of the United States’ Taking Action for Animals conference in Washington, D.C. In 2010 Missy was a member of the Animal Law Panel at the FOHO conference in Flatwoods.

As president of the WVU College of Law SALDF chapter, Missy orchestrated the first Animal Law Week, which brought together various speakers and organizations to discuss how the local community could become involved with animal issues throughout West Virginia. The current Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF) Student Liaison has advised that the event is being considered for a place in the national SALDF spotlight newsletter.

Missy also authored an article for the Animal Law Seminar course discussing and comparing the inadequate laws on puppy mills and the virtually unknown and wholly unregulated problem of bird mills. Missy hopes to submit this article for publication in the near future. She continues to write articles alerting the legal and non-legal communities of the plight of animals in our nation and in our state.

In 2011, Missy competed in the Moot Court competition at the National Animal Law Competitions at Harvard University. Missy and a teammate drafted a brief on an issue that is unfortunately quite prevalent in our nation: breed discrimination. Missy and her teammate argued for both sides of the dispute before a panel of “judges,” including the Mother of Animal Law, Joyce Tischler, and various other attorneys with ALDF, authors, and federal judges.

Advocate Activities . . .

Ginnie R. Maurer, FOHO WV Legislative Action board member, uses her gift of writing to advocate for animals. She writes a monthly column for The Journal, Martinsburg, WV, called Furthermore, which focuses on cat and dog issues. She is a humane education writer for The National Humane Education Society (www.nhes.org) in Charles Town, WV. In addition, she writes on a wide variety of animal-related topics for examiner.com (www.examiner.com/user-ginnie-maurer). And, of course, she writes articles for the FOHO newsletter.

Barbara Grigg, director of Bless the Pets, designs the FOHO WV newsletter. Advocating kind, responsible pet care from a biblical perspective, she works to enlist those outside the traditional animal welfare community to shoulder their civic responsibility and materially assist those groups on the front lines.

She writes op-eds, emails to media and government officials, and materials for targeted distribution to prompt support of shelters, rescue groups and spay/neuter efforts. She wrote a little book entitled Answers About Pets from the Bible. She is an adjunct instructor at Fairmont State University and has an M.A. in Communication from Regent University.

Barbara will approach local churches and civic groups on your behalf by email if you will supply her their contact information.
I am always glad and sad at the same time when the legislative session ends. I’m saddened because many animal lovers do not become involved in the legislative process. Maybe next year we can fill the halls of the Statehouse. I can assure you that this would help pass legislation. The glad part is that I am finding more legislators know the truth and really care. This is a big improvement from the eighties and nineties.

SB 477 concerning ownership of exotic animals has passed, but we will have a rocky road in 2013. This law creates the ability for the Department of Natural Resources and the public through comments in hearings to decide which exotics are to be governed by this law.

I am sure the public comment sessions will be lively; therefore, we will need your input and action to keep this law sensible and reasonable. I listened to the discussions on this bill during the session and even our representatives are divided on which exotics should be covered. I heard some delegates say that it is a rights issue. A person should be able to have whatever he or she wants. I, for one, do not want a lion or tiger living next door to me; wild animals belong in the wild in their native lands.

The other animal bill that passed is The Equine Rescue Facility Act. This bill is good, but it only covers 501C3 rescue groups. Many rescue groups are not 501C3s. This bill requires registration and inspection of the rescue’s facility.

One bill that failed was commonly referred to as the “puppy mill” bill. I do not know why the public thinks a breeder that has eleven or more breeding dogs should not be regulated. This would help the public to purchase healthy animals. Yet, one of the opponents of the bill is the AKC. AKC members should see some of the so-called purebreds they are protecting.

The public does not realize that AKC is just a registry and cannot see or establish the quality and health of animals produced in puppy mills. This is the fourth year this bill has gone down to defeat. Would it not be wonderful if all of these breeders had to pay a fee and collect sales tax that would be directed to spay/neuter of animals of low-income people. I am dreaming again.
The 2012 legislative session ended with disappointment for supporters of the Spay Neuter Assistance Fund bill, SB 479, sponsored by Senate President, Jeffrey Kessler, Marshall County. We were enthusiastic about the bill being sponsored, and it seemed to sail through the committees it was assigned.

Unfortunately, not everyone was enthusiastic, or supportive of the bill. The Pet Food Industry (PFI) chose to engage in a derogatory and inflammatory campaign to kill the bill. Why?

The bill, in its original format, created a fund based on a slight increase to the PFI’s licensing fee. In other words, the PFI would have had to pay an estimated $104,000 more each year (a figure which would vary depending on the number of brands/types of dog or cat food licensed) to sell in West Virginia.

A Facebook campaign was initiated by the PFI, using an Oregon-based firm that had successfully seen a similar measure defeated in Oregon. The campaign “SPOT – Save our Pets from Onerous Taxes,” informed pet owners that the bill would create a pet food “tax” at their expense, even on livestock feed.

About 2,000 West Virginia Facebook users clicked the LIKE button on the page without ever bothering to read the actual bill in its original format.

As a result, a Facebook campaign, “STOP SPOT in WV,” quickly surfaced to counter the misinformation being spread in an effort to protect big business profits.

While this played out in the virtual world, our Senate Agriculture Committee members were entrenched in finding a solution that would allow the bill to continue. Representative Walt Helmick, Pocahontas County, declared he had a solution. The bill was amended, removing the PFI fee text and instead incorporating funds from appropriation – i.e. TAX dollars.

The SPOT campaign had achieved exactly what it claimed to be working to protect state pet owners from. Ironically, the Oregon-based Facebook page was quickly deleted and the 2,000 residents that had LIKED it were left wondering what had happened. Fortunately, the Oregon page is still available for viewing, as they continue to battle on behalf of the PFI’s revenue.

So, the bill was amended, it passed the committees with hardly any opposition, and made it from the Senate floor to the House committees where it again passed through Agriculture with flying colors. But when it was assigned to the Finance Committee, it quietly disappeared.

The explanation was that there were problems with the “tax donation check off” option that had also been added in the amendment. Whenever any attempt at varying funding sources has been added for spay neuter funding, issues arise – whether it is license plates, tax donation check-offs, adding money to rabies shots, etc. The one source that makes sense for long-term funding is the pet food fee.

While the bill didn’t die, it didn’t pass either. And that is a true shame. Approximately 45,000 West Virginians deserve spay neuter assistance funding. Last year we bought $116,000,000 dollars worth of pet food for our beloved Spot and Kitty-Kitty. Surely from profits that sizeable, $104,000 in licensing increases wouldn’t put a strain on the year-end reports provided by Pet Products Association.
(continued from page 6)

**Spay Neuter Assistance Fund legislation - coming back again next year**

ue our optimism, would save more than 22,000 lives each year.

This is the fourth year this bill was introduced. It is also the fourth year the bill did not pass. Each year we hear the same feedback based on the PFI influence. “Pull the funds from somewhere else – use a license plate, tax donation, etc.” Each year the bill is amended to cater to the PFI, and each year no progress is made.

But this year is different. This year FOHO WV Legislative Action will dedicate its efforts to raising awareness, stopping the misinformation fed from paid lobbyist on behalf of the Pet Food Industry, and garnering support from constituents across the state. This year will be spent talking with community organizations, leaders, and businesses about the facts.

Facts like how the state of Maine passed a similar bill several years ago and has experienced a sharp decline in the number of shelter killings and homeless pets.

The Pet Food Industry claims any increase to licensing fees would be passed on to consumers. Even if this scare tactic is true, Maine pet owners have seen an average of only 40 cents per year passed on to them as a result of the passage of the assistance fund.

West Virginians deserve spay neuter assistance funding. Last year we bought $116,000,000 dollars worth of pet food for our beloved Spot and Kitty-Kitty. Surely from profits that sizeable, $104,000 in licensing increases wouldn’t put a strain on the year-end reports provided by Pet Products Association, which reported a 5.8 percent increase nationally for pet food sales resulting in $19.85 BILLION dollars in 2011.

No wonder the PFI could afford the hired guns to lobby against the estimated $104,000 state increase. My question is, isn’t it good business to give back to the community that supports your profit margins faithfully?

Our thanks to all of you who wrote letters, made phone calls, and showed up at the capitol for supporting spay neuter funding in West Virginia.

Also, thanks to Senate President Kessler and Senators Miller and Helmick for their diligence in trying to obtain this very important funding to curb pet-overpopulation in West Virginia.