

A DECADE OF COLLABORATION AT THE ASPCA

“The perseverance and compassion that we observe in animals are the very qualities that are present in the most effective community efforts.”

– ASPCA President & CEO Ed Sayres

In July 2012, ASPCA® President and CEO Ed Sayres announced he is leaving the ASPCA after nearly a decade at the helm. Under Sayres’ leadership, the ASPCA has achieved new levels of prominence as a national leader in animal sheltering, animal welfare laws, and the rescue and rehabilitation of victims of animal cruelty. In less than 10 years, the organization’s membership base has tripled to more than 1.2 million compassionate citizens who support our efforts to eliminate animal suffering in whatever form it takes.

In this issue of *ASPCA Action*, we’re taking a look back at a few of the many accomplishments of Sayres, the ASPCA and its many partners in the tireless quest to build a more humane future for animals.

Building Humane Communities

A leading pioneer in the world of animal sheltering, Ed Sayres was recruited in 2003 to lead the ASPCA and bring his innovative vision and leadership to the City of New York. When Sayres arrived, only 33 percent of the animals in New York City’s shelters made it out alive. Today, New York City has the lowest shelter euthanasia rates per capita, thanks in large part to the collaborative spirit and rich relationships among the many animal rescue groups and shelters across the five boroughs.

The Mayor’s Alliance for NYC’s Animals, a coalition of more

than 150 rescue groups and shelters that are working to end the killing of the city’s homeless animals, has been instrumental in New York’s life-saving trajectory over the past decade. Under Sayres’ leadership, the ASPCA has awarded grants of more than \$8 million to support the Mayor’s Alliance, and to encourage partnerships amongst groups to reduce animal homelessness and save more animals’ lives.

“When I talk to groups around the country about the reversal of fortune for homeless animals in New York City since I’ve been at the ASPCA, the primary question I’m asked is how we did it,” said Sayres. “Getting to where we are today is largely the result of the collaboration of groups and individuals who decided that the killing of healthy and treatable dogs and cats had to stop.”

The ASPCA and Sayres eventually took our dream on the road and replicated New York’s collaborative, life-saving model in communities throughout the country. Today the ASPCA works with approximately 10 communities at a time, and invests human and financial resources in each to save more animals’ lives.

This commitment to collaboration has been essential to the ASPCA’s multi-faceted work to fight animal cruelty and improve the lives of homeless pets over the past decade. From disaster response to animal transport, every step forward



Sam, rescued by the ASPCA in 2011.

Cover Story

has been marked by a deep sense of commitment to a common cause both inside and outside the organization.

Where They Need Us Most

Shortly after Ed Sayres marked his two-year anniversary at the ASPCA, in 2005, the U.S. was hit with one of the deadliest hurricanes in history. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the ASPCA was among the first on the scene, providing critical funding and expertise, and working hand-in-hand with animal welfare groups and thousands of volunteers to rescue, reunite and re-home more than 8,000 animals displaced by the devastation.



ASPCA responders work at the temporary shelter in Joplin, Missouri, in 2011.

From the terrible tragedy of Katrina emerged a new path for the ASPCA. Sayres developed a plan to support the best animal response team in the industry. The ASPCA Field Investigations and Response Team (as it was formally named in 2010) is made up of ASPCA veterinarians, veterinary technicians, disaster responders and shelter professionals, and provides support and skilled assistance to state and federal agencies during natural disasters.

The FIR Team works collaboratively with other emergency responders, humane associations and shelters to rescue animals and provide them with the essential care they need. According to Tim Rickey, Senior Director of the FIR Team, “Animal response coalitions are key to ensuring quick and effective disaster response.”

“When Joplin was ravaged by a tornado in May 2011, we didn’t waste any time,” said Sayres. “Our Team was exhausted from weeks of rescuing animals affected by floods in Arkansas, Kentucky and Mississippi, but they immediately stepped in to assist the Joplin Humane Society and build a temporary animal shelter to house homeless and lost pets.”

The largest sheltering and rescue operation the ASPCA had ever undertaken, Joplin was a bellwether. “Joplin established a new template for disaster response in the animal welfare community,” explained Rickey, “and the way that we communicate and cooperate with local, state and federal entities.”

In addition to its pioneering work in disaster relief, the FIR Team’s expertise has been put to good use in several large-scale cruelty rescues, an essential complement to the robust efforts to combat animal cruelty that have defined much of the ASPCA’s work since 2007. From raiding puppy mills to busting dog fighting rings, the ASPCA has reversed the fortune of

thousands of animal victims of cruelty during Sayres’ tenure.

Cracking Down on Cruel Acts

The 2007 indictment of then-Atlanta Falcons quarterback Michael Vick led to historic changes in the animal welfare field and the nation’s perception of dog fighting. Prior to the investigation, dog fighting cases involving federal authorities were extremely rare. Dog fighting is now banned throughout the United States and has gone from being a felony in 48 states to being a felony in all 50 states. Those convicted of federal animal fighting charges face up to three years in prison for each guilty count.

The ASPCA assisted in the recovery and analysis of forensic evidence from Vick’s property, including carcasses and skeletal remains of numerous Pit Bulls. The evidence helped to convict the football star of operating a competitive dog fighting ring, a federal offense that resulted in a prison term for Vick and three co-defendants.

“This was one of those moments in time when the involvement of an extremely high-profile celebrity in a horrific act prompted universal public outrage,” said Sayres in 2008. “The good that came out of it was that almost every dog seized from the property was saved and has a second chance at living a fulfilled life.”

Following our involvement in the Vick case, Sayres oversaw the launch of a sophisticated Mobile Animal Crime Scene Investigation Unit and the development of a program dedicated to helping federal and local authorities crack down on dog fighting.

In 2009, we assisted the Humane Society of Missouri and federal and state agencies in the largest crackdown on dog fighting in U.S. history in a raid that spanned eight states and resulted in

the rescue of more than 400 dogs. The ASPCA was accountable for the collection of all forensic evidence on site, and since the raid, all 27 defendants from the original 27 federal arrests have been sentenced.

This summer, the ASPCA and the New York Police Department busted a dog fighting operation in the Bronx. We found dozens of dogs and puppies living in the windowless basement of a six-story apartment building with a makeshift fighting arena. The dogs' owner, Raul Sanchez of the Bronx, was arrested during the raid.

For more than two months, ASPCA responders provided the Bronx dogs with extensive socialization, a healthy diet, medical care and exercise at a temporary shelter. Each dog was carefully evaluated by a team of animal behavior professionals, and though some were too dangerous for placement, 33 of the dogs were transferred to rescue for adoption throughout the Northeast (see News Briefs, page 4). These and hundreds of other shelter partners across the country are the backbone of all of our efforts and, through careful collaboration and planning, they make it possible for us to give thousands of animals a second chance.

Finding Their Way Home

In 2010, under Sayres' leadership, the ASPCA took another step forward in cultivating relationships with shelters and rescue groups for a common good. We launched a national competition, the \$100K Challenge, to inspire animal shelters—and those who



ASPCA responder Allison Cardona removes dogs from a Tennessee puppy mill in 2008.

support them—to go above and beyond to save more animals. The goal was to help shelters find new ways to increase pet adoptions, reunite lost pets with their families and decrease euthanasia rates in their communities. In just the first month of this year's contest, participating shelters adopted out or transferred—from shelters to rescue groups where they are more likely to find homes—nearly 20,000 homeless animals.



President and CEO Ed Sayres attends the 2011 ASPCA Bergh Ball.

The ASPCA's Animal Relocation Initiative, spearheaded by Sayres in 2011, also seeks to save more animals by moving those from areas of oversupply to areas where there are few, if any, similar pets available in shelters for adoption. This initiative often supports the work of the ASPCA's FIR Team during emergencies, and works with a network of agencies and shelter partners willing to receive and house animals already living in the community's sheltering system.

This is just one way we make a difference for animals at the local level. Another is our vibrant grants program, which has expanded dramatically in the last 10 years. Knowing that we can't be everywhere all the time, Sayres had the foresight to develop an easy mechanism for the ASPCA to provide funds and resources to organizations working on behalf of animals nationwide. Shortly after he joined the ASPCA, Sayres said that he was determined that our "wonderful accomplishments achieved on the local level continually complement and enhance the wonderful things that take place on the national scene—and vice versa."

It was more than just words. Less than a decade later, the ASPCA has offered up our resources and expertise, nurtured and honed by Sayres' vision, for the cause: In 2011, we awarded \$15.1 million in grants to nearly 750 animal welfare organizations in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and three U.S. territories. The ASPCA is now one of the top three grantmaking animal welfare organizations in the country, along with PetSmart Charities and the PETCO Foundation.

This milestone means millions of animals, no matter where they live or how much they have gone without, finally are receiving the care and support they are due. After all, we—the ASPCA and our members—are their caretakers. Animals depend on us, and according to our leader of nearly a decade, "it's our duty and calling to build a more humane future." ■