

## **Making Animal Law Your Career\***

by Joyce Tischler, ALDF founding director

In a recent article on CareerBuilder.com, entitled “10 Hot Jobs for 2007,” the #2 listed job was “Animal Defense Lawyer.” That elicited laughter from some of the attorneys who are currently trying to make a living in the still nascent field of animal law. A growing number of law students and attorneys want to become animal law specialists, but the supply of jobs lags behind the demand and most attorneys consign animal work to their pro bono hours. I spoke with some of our colleagues and the news from the front is: there is good reason to have hope. Where are all of those “hot” animal law jobs? They are out there, but not necessarily where you might think.

### **Working for Animal Protection Agencies**

In the twenty-six years since I began practicing animal law, the landscape has changed markedly. In 1980, there were about a half dozen attorneys employed by animal protection organizations. Today, most of the large national and an increasing number of regional and local animal protection groups employ lawyers in a variety of capacities, as litigators, lobbyists, corporate counsel and program staff. Some groups offer one year fellowships to recent law graduates, as well as clerkships and internships for law students. The Animal Legal Defense Fund, Physician’s Committee for Responsible Medicine, ASPCA and PETA all employ staff attorneys. The Humane Society of the U.S. employs ten attorneys in its Animal Protection Litigation unit and an additional twenty work elsewhere within the agency.

### **Working for Governmental Agencies**

Some aspiring animal lawyers would not consider working for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Land Management, or a state fish and wildlife agency, for fear that they would be sanctioning the exploitation of animals. However, consider that working for such agencies provides a good education about the application of the relevant law and would enable you to offer a perspective that might not otherwise be heard within the agency. In some governmental positions, you don’t have to leave your values at home. In her “free” time, Leslie Hamilton is a partner in a new law firm that focuses on animal law. In her “paying job” with a county Corporation Counsel, Hamilton provides legal counsel to the county human services department, yet she has been able to focus on a surprising amount of animal law. For example, when the local humane society, under contract with the county, seizes an animal based on an alleged violation of the anti-cruelty law, the owner is notified of their right to contest the seizure. Within the scope of her paid position, Hamilton files a petition, asking the court to transfer ownership of the animal to the humane society. When the local City Attorney brings a dangerous dog case, the Board of Health holds an administrative hearing. Hamilton is assigned to serve as the attorney for the Board of Health, to advise the Board on matters of law and to draft the Board’s decisions. Hamilton has been able to transfer the knowledge that she has gained in child custody proceedings to help the local humane society develop similar forms for use in animal protection proceedings: notice of seizure,

notice of protective custody and abatement. She has also worked on several cases where evidence developed during an animal neglect investigation was used in a related child protection or public health enforcement matter. Hamilton advises the county department of land and water resources, where she has recently drafted ordinances regulating some aspects of confined animal feeding operations located within the county. Every municipality of any size has some animal law work. Those who choose this route can find out where the “animal” work is and offer to handle it. You may be surprised at how much animal related work you will be engaged in.

### **Teaching Animal Law Classes and Seminars; Starting an Animal Law Clinic**

Of the 194 ABA approved law schools in the U.S., over 70 currently offer animal law classes and seminars. These classes are taught mainly by adjunct professors- usually prominent animal law practitioners from the local community. If you live reasonably near one of the remaining 124 law schools, you have an opportunity to teach animal law. ALDF provides resources and advice on how to start an animal law class as well as how to start a clinic, so if this interests you, contact Pamela Alexander ([palexander@aldf.org](mailto:palexander@aldf.org)). For a listing of animal law classes and bar association animal law sections, check the ALDF web site: [www.aldf.org](http://www.aldf.org), Animal Law Program.

### **Attorneys in Private Practice**

The sharpest increase in the number of paid animal law practitioners has been in the private sector. I spoke with Adam Karp of Seattle, WA, Corey Evans and Geneva Page of San Francisco and Howard Crystal of Meyer Glitzenstein & Crystal in Washington, DC, who provided a variety of practical ideas:

- *Specialize.* These practitioners agree that if you try to cover all aspects of animal law, you will be dabbling and are less likely to provide meaningful service to your clients. For example, Karp focuses on personal injury and custody cases; when he gets calls about trusts for companion animals, he refers them to an animal law attorney who does estate planning.
- *Statutory attorneys’ fee provisions.* Evans and Page handle First Amendment free speech cases for animal activists who have been denied the right to protest or leaflet. Both the federal and state laws have attorneys’ fees provisions (See, 42 U.S.C. Sec. 1988; Cal. Code Civ. Proc. Sec. 1021.5) and attorneys’ fees can be negotiated as part of a settlement. These cases offer a stable source of income for their business. Evans and Page also handle California Public Records Act claims (See, Cal. Gov. Code Sec. 6250 et seq.), where an animal activist requests records and is either denied access or provided with inadequate records. In California, where they practice, attorneys’ fees are mandatory, if the filing of the lawsuit causes the release of any requested records.
- *Charge an hourly rate, even if it is significantly reduced.* Taking cases on a contingency or pro bono basis is a primary cause of burnout among animal law practitioners.
- *Stake out new territory.* Select a metropolitan area of a state in which there are no or few other animal law practitioners.

- *Advertise that you practice animal law.* Additionally, write articles for bar association news publications, trade journals and publications of animal control agencies and humane societies.
- *Network.* Participate in local, state and the ABA animal law sections. If your state Bar association doesn't have an animal law section yet, form one. Contact Pamela Alexander (e-mail address, above) for ALDF's Bar Section Starter Kit.

### **One Thing Leads To Another**

Both Jane Hoffman and Meena Alagappan started by volunteering for the New York City Bar Association's Committee on Legal Issues Pertaining to Animals ("NYC Bar Committee"). Alagappan's volunteer work led her to get a Masters degree in Animals and Public Policy from Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine, which led her to become a paid consultant for the Animal Welfare Trust. And, that led her to become the Executive Director of HEART, Humane Education Advocates Reaching Teachers, a new nonprofit agency whose mission is "to inspire and empower educators to implement humane education into school curricula and programs." Alagappan cautions that "a lot of what I've done, I've not been paid for, but you can create your own position and direction."

Jane Hoffman is a founding member of the NYC Bar Committee, while her law practice focused on executive compensation and estate planning. Her volunteer efforts led Hoffman and her Bar colleagues to form a not-for-profit that is "working with the City of New York toward the day when no NYC dog or cat ... is killed merely because he or she does not have a home." Their group, called the Mayor's Alliance for New York City's Animals, has over 100 participating members, including shelters and rescue groups, and Hoffman now serves as its Executive Director. Relationships that were formed through her pro bono Bar work helped her to raise the funds needed to implement the agency's ten year strategic plan. She advises: "create your own opportunities by putting yourself in places where those opportunities will become apparent to you." Both Alagappan and Hoffman stated that their training and experience as attorneys helps them in various aspects of their new jobs.

### **Be Proactive**

The field of animal law is young, but it is growing fast. Each of the colleagues I interviewed is building a career that enables him or her to help and protect animals, in ways that are exciting and innovative. These interviews have opened my eyes to new possibilities. The key to finding those "hot" jobs is to be creative, flexible and, most of all, entrepreneurial.

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Joyce Tischler is the Founding Director of the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF). The author wishes to thank the following colleagues for graciously sharing their insights: Meena Alagappan, Sarah Babcock, Howard Crystal, Corey Evans, David Favre, Bee Friedlander, Leslie Hamilton, Jane Hoffman, Adam Karp, Stacy Lilly, Jonathan Lovvorn, Gilda Mariani and Geneva Page.