Animal Rights Grows Up

Movement’s new message: 
There ought to be a law

When it comes to reading the mood of the public, Paul Leonard’s a pro, and he’s got the résumé to prove it. Before retiring from politics 12 years ago, he was elected to the Ohio state legislature four times, served two terms as the mayor of Dayton and then returned to the capital as lieutenant governor.

And Leonard says adopting a pro-animal platform would be a smart move for any office-seeker.

"Whether you’re running for county commissioner or the legislature or Congress, if you’re not talking about strengthening protections for animals, you’re missing a golden opportunity,” says Leonard, an attorney with a burgeoning animal law caseload. “If there’s one thing I’ve learned in the last few years, it’s that there are a lot of people out there who really support expanding rights for animals. I think they truly are a silent majority.”

One sign of the growing support for animal rights is the ease with which a successful politician from the nation’s Rust Belt can make a second career as an animal lawyer. But it’s not the only sign. As the following profiles show, animal rights advocates can be found nowadays in some surprising places — from sheriff’s departments and courtrooms to leading universities to America’s favorite game show. The movement is growing up, and gaining ground. That’s bad news for those who hope to marginalize us. But it’s great news for the animals.

Eyes on the Prize
Bob Barker, Game Show Host

Thanks to his 30-year run as host of the popular game show The Price Is Right — not to mention an 18-year stint on Truth or Consequences and 21 years as emcee of the Miss USA and Miss Universe pageants — Bob Barker is more than a household name. He’s a TV icon.

When someone like that takes a stand, Amer-
One Cause, Many Faces

What does an animal rights activist look like? For those who get their images mainly from news reports, it may seem there’s a simple answer to that question. Young. Angry. And, more than likely — especially if the activist in question has managed to catch the notice of a camera crew — prone to violence, either real or symbolic.

But there’s another face to the animal rights movement. In fact, there are millions of faces. Many are young, yes, and some are understandably angry; what caring person, seeing the unspeakable cruelty visited upon so many animals day after day, has not experienced anger? The media’s narrow focus, however, yields a distorted picture of what is in fact an increasingly diverse, mainstream movement. Rarely glimpsed are the myriad means by which animal advocates turn the welter of emotions stirred by needless suffering — outrage, empathy, love — into action.

That’s a shame. Vast numbers of Americans recognize that animals have lives and interests of their own, unrelated to the property rights of their “owners.” Yet while this awareness forms the very foundation of the animal rights movement, our cause still resonates with a relatively small fraction of the U.S. public. Despite all the media attention paid to animal issues — or perhaps, given the myth of the Activist as Outlaw, because of it — vast numbers of Americans aren’t getting the message.

What we have here, in that famous phrase, is a failure to communicate. Sadly, many can’t seem to hear the message for the messenger. And the real story — the appalling, systematic abuse and exploitation of animals — is too often lost in rhetorical storms over tactics. For our opponents, the popular stereotype of the militant, violence-prone animal rights activist is a useful fiction. It diverts the nation’s eyes from the plight of animals, and offers a handy alibi for failing to see. It is disinformation, a lie with a purpose. In truth the movement is far more broad-based and law-abiding — and thus more threatening to the corporate ranchers, researchers and “factory farmers” who regard animals as commodities — than the cartoon version regularly beamed into America’s living rooms.

The truth is emerging. So, too, are new messengers, willing and able to carry the message to a wider audience. As this issue of The Animals’ Advocate makes clear, the animal rights movement has grown up. Its ranks today include politicians, cops, quiz show hosts and, of course, lawyers — marching side by side with truck drivers, file clerks, sons and grandmothers and neighbors. People, in other words, who resist caricature as a lunatic fringe. People with a story to tell. And whose message will be heard.

We will always have our militant wing — every movement does — and for that we need make no apologies. But it’s just one part of the story.

The rest, as they say, is history. And that, fortunately, is in our hands.

For the animals,

Steve Ann Chambers
President
No matter what ALDF accomplishes today, the sad fact remains: Millions of animals will still need help tomorrow — and for many more tomorrows after that.

That’s why it’s important that ALDF’s members and supporters take steps now to ensure vigorous legal advocacy on behalf of animals well into the future. And it’s why, starting this spring, donors who remember ALDF in their estate planning will be enrolled in the Barney Legacy Society, named for the chimpanzee at the heart of a landmark legal case. The case, brought by ALDF, gave citizens the right to go to court to ensure that federal animal welfare provisions are enforced.

Among the group’s charter members are a trio of ALDF supporters who illustrate a bit of ancient financial wisdom: No matter what your circumstances, there’s no time like the present to remember the future.

➤ A retired Texas schoolteacher, Ruth Storms has created a will that combines family with animal advocacy. It splits up her assets among a niece, a nephew and her favorite animal advocacy groups, including ALDF. “I can do a little bit while I’m here. I rescued an abandoned dog last year and I’m finding homes for three puppies now,” Storms says. Then, thinking perhaps of all the abandoned dogs and cats still to come, she adds: “It’s good to know my money can keep on working for animals after I’m gone.”

➤ David Bellino, an engineer from Boston, hit it big in the stock market and retired to Florida at the tender age of 30. Six years later he’s working on behalf of animals, fighting for effective spay and neuter programs in his new community. His will leaves all his assets to ALDF. “There’s a lot of things you can do for animals,” he says, “but it seems to me that the legal system really gets at the root of the problem. That’s where real change is going to happen. And that’s why I’m leaving 100 percent of my estate to the Animal Legal Defense Fund.”

➤ A resident of Petaluma, Calif., home to ALDF headquarters, Ginger Belin has named ALDF in a “contingent bequest.” This means she has stipulated in her will that her daughter and son-in-law will receive all her assets upon her passing — assuming they survive her. If they don’t, then her estate goes to ALDF. “It doesn’t cost me anything now,” observes Belin, “and I have the satisfaction of knowing my money will either support my daughter or a worthwhile cause after I’m gone.”

There are many other ways to include ALDF in your estate planning, and help ensure a brighter future for animals. For more information, please contact Linda Manning via e-mail at manning@aldf.org or by calling (707) 769-7771, ext. 16.
Bob Barker

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icans notice. And Bob Barker hasn’t been afraid to take a stand.

“I was always kind to animals when I was growing up, but back when I was a boy no one had heard of ‘animal rights,’” says the 78-year-old broadcasting veteran. “Then about 25 years ago I was asked to be chairman of Be Kind to Animals Week here in Los Angeles. As such, I was invited by some animal groups to take part in their activities. And when I did, they really opened my eyes to the exploitation of animals in this country. As I became more aware, I felt the urge to do what I could to rectify the situation.”

It turned out he could do quite a lot. He donated time and money to various animal-oriented groups and causes. He created his own animal welfare organization, the DJ&T Foundation (named in memory of his wife, Dorothy Jo, and mother, Tilly), which provides grants to spay and neuter clinics across the country. And he didn’t check his convictions at the door when he went to work.

“For years they had been giving away a fur coat on the Miss USA pageant, and I’d been urging them to stop. Then in 1987 they agreed that it would be the last year they did it,” Barker recalls. “So I went to Albuquerque to do the pageant delighted that it was the last time they would give away a fur. But then I was appalled to learn that they were going to have the semi-finalists in the swimsuit competition make their entrance wearing fur coats over their swimsuits. I told them I couldn’t be on stage while that happened. It would make me a complete hypocrite.”

Barker and the show’s producers tussled over the issue for days. Soon, to everyone’s surprise, the debate was making waves far beyond the set.

“It was leaked to the press,” Barker says. “It became a front-page story in newspapers across the country. People were hearing about it on the radio and on television. It was the first time a lot of these people had been made aware of the cruelty to animals in the production of fur. And I’m delighted to say that the fur industry went into decline soon after that. I don’t claim that I’m responsible for that, but I think I helped.”

While he’s well aware of the impact he can have as a celebrity, Barker believes that the most important battles of all won’t be fought in the court of public opinion — they’ll be fought in actual courtrooms.

“Once you’ve done any kind of work on behalf of animals, you know that the law is the answer,” he says. “If we can get young minds interested in animal law, then we’re headed in the right direction.”

Barker has reached out to those young minds with the help of FreMantle Media, the production company behind The Price Is Right. When FreMantle executives asked him how they could show their appreciation for his years on the program, he wasn’t stumped for a second. And he hit the jackpot last year, when the Bob Barker Endowment Fund for the Study of Animal Rights was established at Harvard Law School. The $500,000 endowment supports courses and seminars on animal law and subsidizes the work of scholars in the field.

Though animal rights advocates still have a long way to go, Barker says strides like this one — carving out a permanent niche for animal law at one of the world’s most prestigious universities — are a sign that we’re moving faster and farther than we sometimes think.

“People get discouraged from time to time. I hear them say that they’re burned out,” he says. “Well, all you have to do is look at what we’ve accomplished over the past 25 years or so and I think that should give you all the inspiration you need to continue the work.”
Bearing Witness

Cass Sunstein, Legal Scholar

The big noise on campus these days — especially at law schools — is the sound of muzzles coming off.

“People who were interested in animal rights felt a bit like they should be quiet about that fact because it wasn’t in the mainstream as much as it is now,” says Cass Sunstein, an authority on constitutional and administrative law and the author of several well-regarded books about the legal system. “I’ve been surprised in the last few years to learn the extent to which a wide range of people — academics who teach law, students who are studying law — are very concerned about cruelty to living creatures. They just weren’t saying so until they heard that other people were interested, too.”

Sunstein himself is certainly doing plenty of talking about the subject these days. A professor at the University of Chicago Law School, he incorporates discussion of animal rights into a class he teaches on environmental law. A prolific author, he’s written about animal rights issues in such high-profile forums as the New York Review of Books and The New Republic. He’s also co-editing a book of essays on animal rights by legal scholars and philosophers — some of the very people who might have felt uncomfortable identifying themselves with the subject just a few years ago.

“The progress has been slow, but we’re definitely moving in the right direction,” Sunstein says. “As more people in academics start discussing animal law and more law schools add courses on the subject, you’re going to see more people practicing law who are committed to the well-being of animals. And that’s going to have a huge impact.”

Copping to Compassion

Sherry Schlueter, Police Officer

“Some of my earliest memories from childhood are of being so outraged when I saw anything abused — animals, bugs, whatever,” says south Florida native Sherry Schlueter. “My classmates from first and second grade say they remember me as the little girl who wouldn’t let anyone step on a roach. I was the one who would carry a spider out of the room and let it go.”

As Schlueter grew older, her career path seemed obvious. She would become a veterinarian. But a couple of summers spent working for vets changed her mind.

“I didn’t agree with certain procedures that were being performed, such as cropping ears and docking tails and declawing cats,” she recalls. “I was appalled.”

So Schlueter eventually found a new field: law enforcement. In 1979 she entered the police academy for Broward County, just north of Miami. The following year she was a sheriff’s deputy. Though initially she had the same duties as every other rookie cop, Schlueter eventually got her dream assignment. She was made a one-woman animal cruelty task force, investigating cases and pushing for prosecutions. And when she grew dissatisfied with the sentences being handed down, she did something about that, too. She helped draft a felony animal cruelty statute for the state. In 1989, a slightly revised version of her bill became law.

And the first cop to make an arrest and get a conviction under the new law? Schlueter, of course.

Over the years, the one-woman crusade has continued on next page
Sherry Schlueter

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grown into a 40-member department — the Special Victims and Family Crimes section, created and headed by Schlueter. It’s no accident that spouse, child and elder abuse now fall under Schlueter’s purview. From the beginning, she’s been trying to open other officers’ eyes to the link between cruelty to animals and domestic violence. She now gets to make that point as a frequent lecturer at the Broward County police academy as well as at seminars across the country.

While Schlueter urges the people she calls her “brothers and sisters in law enforcement” to fully commit themselves to protecting animals, she’s heartened that society at large is already moving in that direction.

“Back in the 1960s, I knew that cosmetics and oven cleaners and all that were being tested on animals, but I never thought mainstream America would notice. But it has,” Schlueter says. “People are starting to make conscious choices about the products they buy. They’re not all necessarily embracing an animal rights philosophy, but they’re embracing a humane and protective attitude towards animals. And I’m very encouraged by that.”

Raising the Bar

Jane Hoffman, Attorney

Over the last two decades, some animal rights groups have resorted to outrageous stunts and “in-your-face” campaigns to push the move-
Paul Leonard, Attorney/Ex-Mayor

Paul Leonard got his first taste of civil service years before he traveled to Columbus to serve in the Ohio House of Representatives — or even learned how to drive a car. At the age of 12, the future lieutenant governor and Dayton mayor joined the safety patrol at his elementary school. It was while he was doing his rounds that he had his face-to-face introduction to animal cruelty.

“I came across a kid who had a big stick in his hand, and he was literally beating the life out of a dog with it,” Leonard says. “After I put a stop to that, I did a lot of thinking about how defenseless some animals are.”

Years later, after Leonard left politics and began practicing law full-time, his work as an attorney brought back memories of that disturbing childhood incident. Though his specialty was employment law, he learned of an interesting new field that might give him a chance to help animals again, this time on a much larger scale.

“I read some articles about the universities that were starting to teach animal law and I decided to look into that,” he says. “Employment law is really civil rights work, so in a way it’s the same thing. I’d been doing all this civil rights work for two-legged animals and now hopefully I could do some civil rights work for four-legged animals.”

These days, Leonard is doing just that. He’s represented both animals and animal rights groups, with a primary focus on cases involving claims of negligence and non-economic damages, such as loss of companionship and emotional distress.

“My goal is to use civil law to put people in a position where it’s going to cost them money if they mistreat animals,” says Leonard, who plans to launch a new nonprofit organization, the Center for Animal Law and Advocacy, this year.

Of course, being a high-profile former politico has its drawbacks. “I was opened up, and I was tempted to run for it — for about a minute. I think there’s a lot of support out there for a politician who makes animals a priority. But I’m a Democrat, so I’d be going in there as a part of the minority and I’m not sure how much I could have accomplished,” he says.

“The legislative branch is so dominated by special interests and contributions these days. Hopefully, the judiciary can be more independent. I think we can get a couple of judges to say, ‘This is common sense — animals aren’t just property.’ And that’s going to change everything.”

Unusual Suspects

After the horrific events of Sept. 11, headline writers and headline seekers alike went in search of the Next Big Threat to national security. A few of them came up with an unlikely candidate.

You.

Opinion pieces in USA Today, the Daily Oklahoman, the Topeka Capital-Journal, the Deseret News and other publications demonized animal rights activists. One fact-challenged columnist for the Toronto Star went so far as to brand ALDF an “extremist” group, recklessly linking us with firebombings and “letters booby-trapped with razor blades” — ludicrous insinuations at odds with our mission and history of working lawfully through the courts. Meanwhile, back in the nation’s capital, Colorado Rep. Scott McInnis held hearings aimed, apparently, at proving that U.S. animal rights and environmental activists are dupes of Osama bin Laden.

Why attack a movement that is overwhelmingly law-abiding and peaceful? As attorney Jane Hoffman sees it, it’s simply confirmation that animal rights advocates are making progress.

“Just saying ‘This is a silly issue’ doesn’t cut it anymore. So now they’re upping the ante,” Hoffman says. “These industries like pharmaceuticals and biomedical research and dairy and poultry and all the others — they’re worried. So they just figure this is a good time to smear anybody who engages in any kind of activism. But I think people are going to see that for what it is, and ultimately it’s going to backfire.”

Until that happens, Bob Barker — a vocal animal advocate who’s been in the public eye for half a century — says the movement should be proud of its attackers, not intimidated by them.

“All of us who’ve tried to do anything for animals have been criticized,” he says. “Usually, we’re criticized by the people who are profiting from the exploitation of animals. I’ve been the whipping boy of the fur industry and the research industry. I’ve been the focus of countless less-than-flattering stories in their trade papers. And when you have that kind of critic — well, I think you must be doing the right thing.”
LDF’s efforts to halt the hunting of endangered sheep got a boost in March, when a federal judge denied a U.S. government motion to dismiss a lawsuit aimed at blocking the issuance of permits to so-called trophy hunters.

ALDF, the Fund for Animals, Earth Island Institute and several other plaintiffs brought the suit last summer to stop the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from allowing hunters to import the heads and other parts of argali sheep killed in certain regions of Central Asia. Argali sheep are formally designated by the agency as endangered throughout most of their range. But in three countries — Mongolia, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan — they are listed as threatened, a status that offers far less protection. A proposal by the Fish and Wildlife Service to upgrade the sheep’s status to endangered in those countries has been in limbo for almost a decade.

Meanwhile, despite the agency’s own fears for the species’ survival, it has granted hunters more than 550 permits to import argali “trophies” into the United States, at least 100 of which are still valid.

In March, the Dalai Lama called for an end to the killing of argali sheep in Mongolia. “I am deeply saddened to learn that Mongolia encourages trophy hunting of rare and endangered species for tourism,” he said in a statement. “I therefore appeal to all concerned in Mongolia not to indulge in trophy hunting of rare and endangered species. I make this appeal as a Buddhist because of our respect and compassion for all living beings.”

The suit contends that the permits violate the Endangered Species Act and other rules specific to argali sheep, the largest species of wild sheep in the world. Now that the government’s motion to dismiss has been denied, both sides will produce motions for summary judgment, a process expected to take several months.