

## **The National Animal Interest Alliance: Then and Now**

**The animal welfare organization for people who live and work with animals**

As we start our 28<sup>th</sup> year and build on our national legislative campaign to rein in the massive and poorly regulated importation of dogs from foreign countries, it might be a good time to look at where we are and how we got here.

### **NAIA History**

Oregon had long been a hotbed of animal rights extremism, but until the 1991 legislative session when anti-breeder legislation took aim at us, most of us hadn't noticed. We were oblivious to news reports about the firebombing at Oregon State's mink farm, or the trashing of the University of Oregon's research laboratory, or the countless media reports of vandalism and intimidation carried out by animal rights extremists. They were just so much background noise. None of us paid much attention.

We started the 1991 legislative session with a group organized to fight overreaching canine legislation called Responsible Dog Breeders of Oregon, but ended the year founding the National Animal Interest Alliance, a group we created to be more effective against the radical ends-justifies-the-means movement that had us in its crosshairs.

During our legislative fight, we met representatives of other animal-related groups and realized immediately that we needed to form a working coalition.

We met biomedical research scientists who feared for the mice in their labs and for the patients who were depending on them for treatments and cures. AIDS was a leading focus of animal research in the early 1990s and we were all praying for breakthroughs. We met patient advocates for research who were alive because of transplantation or other modern medical miracles that were developed using animals. We met farmers whose fences were routinely cut releasing their horses and other livestock; hunters who were prevented by law from harvesting predator species that were now killing livestock and pets in suburbia; and store owners who could no longer afford insurance because of the steady vandalism

waged against their businesses, e.g., broken windows, glued locks, cut phone lines, etc.

Even the most compassionate among us understood at some level that the tactics being used were incompatible with a free society as well as harmful to the animals themselves. This was an anarchist movement that disguised its fundamental goals by using the animals for cover and to raise money.

The animal rights agenda: <http://www.naiaonline.org/articles/article/the-animal-rights-agenda#sthash.K8D5zQpH.dpbs>

The lynchpin for me, and the event that launched NAIA, occurred in the aftermath of an article I wrote for *Kenel Review*. We had won our legislative battle in Oregon and Richard Beauchamp thought that other jurisdictions could learn from our experience. The article described some of our adversaries' characteristics, in particular the tactics of the animal rights movement. Upon publication, our lives changed. Our large country mailbox became the repository for dead animals and unsolicited letters threatening me to stop writing, some giving vivid descriptions of our son, his new green jacket and the route he took to school. Our phone started ringing at 3 am.

If there was any doubt about the malevolence and danger posed by this movement before – and the need to oppose it – these attempts at intimidation erased it for good. History teaches about such movements and calls us to take action against them. In its simplest terms, those of us who recognized the scope and danger posed by this gang of thugs felt a responsibility to organize against it, not only to preserve our animals, but to protect society from what was obviously a powerful and destructive movement. It was, after all, the only social movement in the US with its own terrorist arm, the Animal Liberation Front.

### **Unifying the animal groups and industries was essential**

We recognized that unifying the various animal-related groups was essential. None of us was capable of beating this behemoth alone. To this day, NAIA has a board made up of people from diverse animal-related backgrounds, professionals like veterinarians and animal scientists, equine experts and enthusiasts, livestock experts, rodeo as well as purebred dog enthusiasts.

We learned quickly that much of what we knew about each other came from the stereotypes promoted by the activists. So, from the beginning we set out to educate each other about the realities of our groups and to provide the public with a balanced, fact-based approach to animal welfare issues. We wanted to help people to better understand complicated animal welfare issues and counter the all-too-common misperceptions held by the public. Clearly every group has its bad actors, but the extremists' art form is to paint entire groups using the black sheep in it that do not represent the majority.

### **We're in a public relations war**

Experience teaches us that the primary battle we're in, and the one we have the most ability to impact, should be viewed as a public relations war. Even when we defeat bad legislation, the media campaigns that run concurrently are able to shift public perception in the direction of the activists' claims.

### **Conflict fundraising Industry**

Specifically, many of the groups we oppose are part of the conflict fundraising industry. They understand as de Tocqueville stated a century and a half ago, that "it is easier for the public to accept a simple lie than a complex truth."

When looking at the animal rights playbook, it's easy to see that hardcore propaganda is its primary tool: distortions, disturbing imagery, half-truths, big lies, sensationalism, emotionally charged buzzwords, celebrity support, front groups, false premises, etc., etc., etc.

The important thing for everyone to understand is this: Propaganda fosters the perceptions that lead to legislation; so by the time we're battling legislation, we have already lost the public relations war! In other words, we need to focus on raising our image, fixing problems where they exist and changing the conversation.

Kim Sturla, the director of the Peninsula Humane Society who spearheaded the San Mateo spay or pay ordinance in the late 1980s expresses the extremists' objective very clearly: **"Our goal is to make the public think of breeding dogs and cats like drunk driving and smoking."**

That is why NAIA has always focused on raising the image of the hands-on animal experts who are still engaged in husbandry, whether breeding, training or hunting their dogs, raising livestock, caring for laboratory animals, or just sitting by the fire with a favorite pet. We want to preserving our endangered domestic breeds, conserve wildlife and protect the human animal bond in all its many traditional forms for future generations. The assets that help us achieve this outcome are listed below.

Our diverse and respected board of directors and officers, (<http://www.naiaonline.org/about-us/board-members/> ) along with our huge grassroots base, enables us to work within and across industry, science, business and hobby communities; to bridge gaps between urban and rural, and to open communication between breeder and retail sectors of the pet industry. Further, this network enables us to be effective in multiple states and at the federal level where we've hired one of the most respected lobbying firms in Washington DC, the Russell Group.

NAIA's success also comes from our subject matter expertise and the programs we've developed that provide reliable information on a host of animal-related topics: Pet population trends; the health risks posed by unregulated dog importation; genetic diseases in dogs and the people and organizations that are reducing and eliminating them.

Our goal has always been to "take back the conversation" from the fundraising groups that have dominated it for 30 years, so that our constituents can represent their own issues in a heartfelt but factual way. **The media and lawmakers now call on us.**

For the past 27 years NAIA has been working tirelessly on your behalf, now we are asking you to work with us and support NAIA to defeat those groups who wish to destroy the very existence of our breeds and domestic animals.

The most important thing the dog fancy can do is to join and share their personal expertise. We'll put you to work if you are available. If you are able to contribute financially, take a page from the animal rights fundraisers by pledging monthly contributions of any size. \$10 a month will go a long way with us. And please encourage your club to support NAIA as well.

## **The mission**

The mission of NAIA is to promote the welfare of animals; strengthen the human-animal bond; and safeguard the rights of responsible animal owners, enthusiasts and professionals through research, public information and sound public policy. [Read our values statement here.](#)

[http://www.naiaonline.org/uploads/Main\\_Upload\\_Directory/NAIA-Values-Statement.pdf](http://www.naiaonline.org/uploads/Main_Upload_Directory/NAIA-Values-Statement.pdf)

NAIA's special niche is protecting the relationship between people and animals, supporting the human animal bond and working to preserve our domestic animals.

## **What you can do to support NAIA and our common mission**

- Join NAIA and/or NAIA Trust either online or at a dog show (If you want to help us raise funds, please contact us and we'll put you to work)
- If you are a writer, pitch us on an article. Help us develop the best animal-related content on the web, not only interesting in its own right, but effective in countering anti-pet propaganda.
- Attend NAIA annual conferences. We've held 27 conferences so far, and they are world class events.
- Join and like our Facebook page

## **Resources**

- NAIA website: [www.naiaonline.org](http://www.naiaonline.org)
- NAIA Trust website: [www.naiatrust.org](http://www.naiatrust.org) (NAIA's legislative associate which was founded in 2001)
- NAIA Trust Online Lobby Center: <http://cqrcengage.com/naiatrust/?0>
- NAIA Shelter Project [shelterproject.naiaonline.org](http://shelterproject.naiaonline.org) (the largest database of shelter data in the US.)
- Various pet population studies
- [AnimalHeroes.naiaonline.org](http://AnimalHeroes.naiaonline.org) (a program that rehomes dogs that were formerly used in research)
- [DiscoverAnimals.org](http://DiscoverAnimals.org) (an interesting website for animal lovers of all ages.)

- NAIA Blog [www.naiaonline.org/blog/](http://www.naiaonline.org/blog/)
- <https://www.naiaonline.org/donate/NAIAdonate.php>
- Facebook presence at National Animal Interest Alliance and NAIA Trust