Ohio Horse Trader Exposed

A Summit County common pleas magistrate has sent a strong message to northeast Ohio horse trader Louie Simboli. Simboli offered to take horses from owners who could no longer care for them and place them in adoptive homes. Instead, he sold them for slaughter. GLRO diligently tracked complaints about Simboli’s activities, but it was two years until he was caught in the act of taking a horse to an auction where “killer buyers” purchased horses for slaughter.

That’s when HSUS secured the services of an Akron area attorney willing to search out persons who might have been harmed by Simboli. Jeffrey Holland, Esq., identified eight people who had given horses to Simboli after being promised that their beloved pets would end up in adoptive homes, and that they could even

They frequent the dumpster behind the local fast-food restaurant. They grab leftover food from pets’ bowls around the neighborhood. They bring their babies to live under porches. They’re beautiful and largely untouchable. And they’re probably one of the most challenging problems faced by animal care and control organizations nationwide. Who are they? Feral cats.

Experts suspect that there are as many feral cats as there are pet cats in the United States. Animal shelters in many cities are struggling with increasing numbers of unwanted cats and kittens at the same time as their numbers of puppies and dogs are steady or dropping. Many of the cats in shelters are euthanized for lack of adoptive homes. A large number of rural shelters are not equipped to handle cats at all, leaving few options for residents with feral cat problems. Private volunteer-based cat rescue groups report being overwhelmed with requests for help from citizens.

Why is everyone so concerned about these cats who are too unsocialized to be placed in a typical household? First, there are humane concerns about the suffering of feral cats from disease, exposure, and injury. Upper respiratory viruses, ringworm, feline leukemia, and other transmissible feline ailments can contribute to shortened life spans for ferals. Frostbitten ears and tails aren’t uncommon in Michigan’s winter climate. And how many cats are killed by cars in the state each year? No one knows. But judging by those seen lying dead at the side of the road, the number could be alarming.

Feral cats may form colonies around food sources, impacting a few houses or a whole city block. Some people dislike it when feral cats use their gardens as litter boxes. Bird lovers are concerned about the not-well-understood effects ferals may have on songbird populations. While unneutered males fight with each other and with outdoor pet cats, the females can produce up to three litters of kittens every year. These “untamed” felines look just like our own pet cats, but may bite and scratch if handled.

While problems surrounding feral cats are easily identified, solutions have yet to be adequately studied and implemented. In late 2003, GLRO and Capital Area Humane Society convened a state roundtable that includes a wide variety of groups concerned about feral cats in Michigan. Animal control agencies, public and private animal shelters, cat rescue groups, and veterinarians brought their questions and ideas together, with the goal of identifying approaches to reduce the number of feral cats in the state. Specific aims of the group include determining the extent of feral cat problems in the state and

Thanks to GLRO’s efforts, an Ohio man was made to pay for selling horses to slaughter whom he had promised to find homes for.
The Appalachian Project does not bring its free spay/neuter and animal wellness clinics to exotic island nations or to the vistas of the Appalachian West as other Rural Area Veterinary Services (RAVS) programs do. But the small towns and tree-lined winding roads of Appalachia still attract veterinarians and students from all over the country. Dr. Sue Berlin, a small animal veterinarian in Indiana, is one of them. Although she has volunteered on one RAVS Native American reservation trip, fortunately for the Appalachian Project, its shorter, weekend clinics are a better fit for her. Over the past three years, she has shared her time and talent at nearly 20 clinics in Tennessee and Ohio. As she puts it, “You don’t have to go very far from home to find people who need help.”

Dr. Berlin knows first hand that there are many who can’t afford veterinary care, especially the cost of spay/neuter surgery, which is so important to reducing the number of unwanted dogs and cats. With RAVS, she helps needy pet owners, their pets, and the communities. She also enjoys helping student volunteers gain valuable experience. It’s rewarding to share her knowledge and skill, and she appreciates an environment in which everyone can learn from everyone else. She wishes there had been a program like RAVS when she was a veterinary student. The 1990 Texas A&M graduate finds that interacting with students and veterinarians from all over the country is a fantastic form of continuing education. It’s also fun.

Dr. Berlin says she is in awe of how many people are involved in making each clinic a success. “Local humane societies, RAVS staff, student and veterinary volunteers—so many people are helping and learning at the same time. Absolutely everyone benefits.”

Veterinarians from Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, Virginia, and Wisconsin have volunteered at Ohio clinics. Applications and guidelines for veterinary students and professionals interested in volunteering for RAVS clinics are available at www.ruralareavet.org.

Identifying groups that are working to address the problems and assessing their success. The group proposes to create a list of recommendations for local governments and animal groups.

At the group’s first meeting, a special guest presented the pros and cons of one method of feral cat control. Dr. Margaret Slater of Texas A&M University, one of the foremost authorities on feral cats and author of the new book “Community Approaches to Feral Cats: Problems, Alternatives, and Recommendations to Humane Society University Press,” helped the group dissect the components of the Trap-Test-Vaccinate-Neuter-Return-Monitor approach, a method of stabilizing feral cat colonies as human caretakers monitor the cats’ conditions. Other potential solutions will be discussed at future meetings.

GLRO is committed to helping Michigan’s cat concerned agencies and organizations measure the extent of their problems, test and share solutions, and promote the bigger picture to legislators and cat owners alike. We all have one goal: no unwanted cats—feral or otherwise. You can become involved too. Learn about HSUS’s Safe Cats campaign at www.humanesafecats.org. There you’ll find ways to keep cats healthy and happy indoors.
Michigan has finally begun to decline, sending a strong message to the rest of the country that goose conflicts can be managed in urban areas without killing adult geese.

### Animal Sheltering
Several shelters in the Great Lakes region have graduated from our Pets for Life training, designed to teach shelter professionals how to implement behavior and other assistance programs for their communities and the animals in their care. GLRO developed and delivered Shelter Toolkit workshops region wide. Through Project Outreach, GLRO brings specialized training and resources to previously underserved shelters and organizations in Ohio. Humane Society University online training courses (including a course developed in this office) are accessible to anyone on the Internet.

### Disaster Response
HSUS is taking a much more active role in responding to animal-related disasters. GLRO staff members have been on the ground helping animals and agencies during recent flooding in West Virginia and tornados in Ohio. Sometimes our help is of a different type—money that helps rebuild damaged facilities or acquire pet food and supplies for local needs.

### Animal Cruelty
GLRO has held multiple First Strike workshops about the connection between animal abuse and human violence in all four of our states for social workers, judges, prosecutors, teachers, animal cruelty investigators, and many others. I currently hold two advisory positions on the boards of other assistance programs for their communities and the animals in their care. GLRO developed and delivered Shelter Toolkit workshops region wide. Through Project Outreach, GLRO brings specialized training and resources to previously underserved shelters and organizations in Ohio. Humane Society University online training courses (including a course developed in this office) are accessible to anyone on the Internet.

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With these victories under our belt, just imagine where we are headed in the future. Of course you—the members and supporters of The HSUS—have made all these victories possible. In this, our 50th year, let’s all celebrate our advances for animals.

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**Director’s Report**

By Sandy Rowland

Director of the Great Lakes Regional Office (photo from early 1980s)

50 Years Worth Celebrating

Anyone who knows me knows that I love a celebration. This year The HSUS celebrates its 50th anniversary. I want to share with you just a few of the regional accomplishments that we will be celebrating all year long.

**Pet Overpopulation**

In 2002, HSUS introduced the Rural Area Veterinary Services program, which delivers free spay/neuter, basic health care, and humane education to rural communities on Native American reservations, in Appalachia, and in other countries from the Caribbean to South America. GLRO has played a crucial role in bringing this critical service to 2,559 dogs and cats in nine southeastern Ohio counties.

**Wildlife**

Seven years ago, our office instigated what has become the largest Canada goose egg replacement program in the country. Working in conjunction with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, local volunteers, and landowners, a total of 22,746 eggs have been prevented from hatching. The goose population in southeastern Michigan has finally begun to decline, sending a strong message to the rest of the country that goose conflicts can be managed in urban areas without killing adult geese.

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**GLRO Director Sandy Rowland speaks out against pound seizure at a legislative hearing in Lansing, Michigan.**