Animals are central to Colin Berry’s and Jason Ahalt’s lives. Colin, HSUS director of innovations, met the Maryland state K-9 officer in 2005 at a weekend cruelty investigation class. Animals continued to mark important milestones in the couple’s courtship through the years. In fact, it was after they rescued a crab that Colin realized Jason was “the guy.” She found the solitary crustacean, meant for the dinner table at a picnic, beneath a plastic bag in a cooler. Without hesitation, Jason grabbed his keys and drove Colin to the Chesapeake Bay to set the crab free.

So it was only natural that the couple wanted their wedding to celebrate not just their relationship but the animals who were an integral part of their personal story. They named the guest tables after eight animals and created a booklet explaining how each one had played a part in their growth as a couple. Guests were given copies as wedding favors, and Colin and Jason donated the money they would have used on traditional favors to eight animal welfare organizations. And of course, their beloved dogs, Gracie and Scruffy, walked them down the aisle to the Beatles’ song “All You Need Is Love.”

What is a wedding? A celebration of love, of course, with a side order of obsession over bridesmaid dresses, cake flavors, music, and where to seat relatives who aren’t on speaking terms. But for the compassionate couples profiled here, all that took a backseat to making sure that their nuptials celebrated their commitment to animals as well as to each other. Whether it was enlisting a furry ring bearer, crafting animal-themed favors, or forsaking gifts in lieu of donations to animal charities, these newlyweds found ways to weave their personal philosophies of humane living into the centuries-old traditions that make a wedding what it is.
Today’s couples see no reason to exclude furry family members from participating in The Big Day. Paige’s company, The Wedding Dog, provides full-service wedding planning with a twist. An animal behaviorist based in Portland, Ore., Paige will not only plan your event, she’ll train your pet to walk down the aisle and design a fabulous floral collar, tiny tux, or couture cape for your four-legged attendant.

Incorporating an animal into the ceremony can be really fun, says Paige, but it adds an unpredictable element. She should know: She’s trained cats, birds, a horse, a donkey, a goat, and a pot-bellied pig for wedding duty. The pig did well in rehearsals, but on wedding day, she couldn’t resist stopping to smell—and devour—the aisle flowers. The best man’s efforts to nudge her toward the altar resulted in loud squeals of porcine protest and peals of laughter from the bride and groom.

An avid animal lover, Paige is always thinking of ways her wedding work can help save lives. With her clients’ wholehearted support, she’s invited rescue groups to attend receptions with adoptable dogs and once staged a concert at a wedding, raising $3,500 in “ticket sales” for a local rescue.

One of the first things that drew Chris Ewald to Molly Matthews was her love of animals and dedication to volunteering at her hometown animal shelter. He soon joined her in walking dogs and helping out at adoption events at the Humane Society/SPCA of Nelson County’s Almost Home Pet Adoption Center in Lovingston, Va. Nearly two years later, while planning their wedding, the couple had a special request of their guests: Instead of gifts, they asked that donations be made to the shelter that means so much to them.

Family and friends gave more than $6,300, an amount that could have covered a good chunk of the wedding costs or several mortgage payments. But Chris and Molly, now living in Morgantown, W.Va., had no second thoughts about their decision. “I never felt like we gave up anything,” says Chris. “… It was so much more of a rewarding gift than anything tangible we would have gotten.”

In addition to honoring love, friendship, and family, Lindsay Wolf and Steven Smith wanted their nuptials to reflect what they found most important in life. For Lindsay, this meant a meal aligned with her do-no-harm values. As their wedding gift to each other, she asked her omnivore fiancé for a vegetarian reception; Steve readily agreed.
Lindsay’s parents supported the idea, while Steve’s were somewhat resistant, she says, concerned that “family members, especially older ones, wouldn’t come or bring gifts if there wasn’t filet mignon as an option.” With patience and persistence, Steve was able to bring his parents around to the couple’s viewpoint that celebrating love should matter more than a meal.

The caterer, who had never prepared a meat-free spread, worked closely with the couple to create a delicious menu. Lindsay “felt really cool” when the venue was then able to offer the dishes they’d developed to other couples looking for similar options.

Weeks before the wedding, Steve gave Lindsay another gift: He decided to follow a vegan diet. And it wasn’t long after the wedding that Lindsay’s mom and Steve’s parents adopted a vegetarian diet. “What I found with my lifestyle,” says Lindsay, “[is] the more that I’ve shared it positively, it’s had a ripple effect.”

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**Chocolate-Dipped Strawberries with Whipped Vanilla Bean Cream**

Planning a wedding? Whether you’re preparing the food yourself or hiring a caterer, this recipe from Los Angeles–based Spork Foods will set the standard for classic and romantic reception fare.

### CHOCOLATE-DIPPED STRAWBERRIES

1. In a double boiler (or a microwave-safe bowl), melt chocolate chips (use low heat if microwaving). Add sea salt and cinnamon. Whisk until uniform and smooth, and turn heat to low.
2. Dip strawberries into chocolate mixture. Before chocolate cools, roll in shredded coconut or chopped nuts, if desired.
3. Place berries on baking sheet lined with parchment or wax paper.
4. Let berries cool for about 10 minutes, then refrigerate for about 20–30 minutes.
5. Serve strawberries on a platter with a small bowl of the whipped cream for dipping.

### VANILLA BEAN CREAM

1. Carefully open the can of refrigerated coconut milk, making sure not to shake it. With a spatula or spoon, remove only the cream from the top and discard the coconut water or use in another recipe. Place the cream in a standing mixer.
2. Slice carefully into the vanilla bean lengthwise. Pry open the bean and, using the back of the knife, scrape out seeds and add to the mixer.
3. Add the sea salt and maple crystals or organic evaporated cane sugar (both available in natural foods stores) to the mixer and blend on high, until the mixture is whipped and thickens.
4. Keep refrigerated until serving. (The whipped cream keeps for about four days.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRAWBERRIES</th>
<th>VANILLA BEAN CREAM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 pound fresh organic strawberries, tops left on, washed and dried well</td>
<td>1 14-ounce can full-fat coconut milk, refrigerated overnight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cup organic dark chocolate chips</td>
<td>1 vanilla bean, seeds only</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dash sea salt</td>
<td>¼ teaspoon sea salt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ teaspoon ground Ceylon cinnamon*</td>
<td>1 tablespoon maple crystals or organic evaporated cane sugar (both available in natural foods stores)</td>
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<tr>
<td>¼ cup shredded coconut (optional)</td>
<td>(optional)</td>
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<tr>
<td>¼ cup chopped nuts (optional)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Ceylon, or “true” cinnamon, is typically available in specialty stores. It has a lighter and more complex flavor than the more commonly sold Cassia cinnamon, but Cassia cinnamon can be substituted.

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TO RECEIVE a free weekly Meatless Monday text with a link to a mobile-friendly recipe, text TASTY to 30644. For more recipes, visit humanesociety.org/recipes.
Q & A

ROY AND BRANDY HALLADAY

Philadelphia Phillies star Roy Halladay ranks among Major League Baseball’s best pitchers. Off the field, Halladay and his wife, Brandy, have established themselves as aces for animals and people as well. The Halladay Family Foundation supports hunger prevention programs, special events for ill and at-risk children, and equine protection efforts. A long-time horse lover, Brandy is an advocate for The HSUS’s new Safe Stalls program. The HSUS’s Chad Sisneros recently spoke with the couple for this excerpted interview.

Your family includes four dogs, four horses, three guinea pigs, and two cats. Does sharing your home with pets help you deal with the stress of being a professional athlete, especially when you’re coming home after a tough loss?

ROY: Getting home at the end of the day, whether it’s during the season or the off-season, and having a dog run up and just sit in your lap and kind of hang out, it just kind of relaxes you. And that’s what’s so great about pets: You have a good day or bad day, they still want to be your friend.

Talk about the Safe Stalls program for equines in need.

BRANDY: So many times it might take you a week or two to gather everything you need to rescue those horses. And in the meantime, they’re still standing there suffering. The HSUS is trying to bring together a database for each state, so that no matter where there is a rescue, they have resources to pull from—whether it is someone who has stalls or a pasture, or [who] can donate hay, or vets who will donate their services. Some people have trailers; they can help you transport. There are endless ways people can help with this program. So The HSUS is trying to compile all of those people into one big database, so no matter what, wherever they go, they can move quicker into the rescue process.

Last year, you fostered a horse from an HSUS rescue in Lindale, Texas, where dozens of emaciated horses were seized. What was that like?

ROY: You start to realize how bad things can really get. It’s hard to see that kind of pain and suffering, but seeing them change and become loving and trusting animals and pets …

BRANDY: Family members.

ROY: Yeah. It’s very gratifying to see them transform that way.

BRANDY: People always say to us, “You love horses. Are you sure you want to see that? How can you see that?” And in my eyes, if I don’t see it, I can’t change it. Just because you don’t see it, doesn’t mean it’s not there. And we need to see it, and everybody else needs to see it too, so that they understand how important it is that we change the laws so that horses have the rights that our companion animals have.

WATCH a PSA featuring the Halladays, and learn more about the Safe Stalls program, at humanesociety.org/safestalls.

BOOK SHELF

Forget intensive MBA programs and leadership tomes. If you’re a manager needing a role model, channel your inner canine. That’s the premise behind Robert Vetere’s From Wags to Riches, written with journalist Valerie Andrews. The president of the American Pet Products Association, Vetere makes a persuasive case for why dogs—in all their pack-loving, communicative, intuitive glory—are exemplary leaders. His fun advice about teamwork and timely feedback reflects the tenets of Dogdom: People, like dogs, “are eminently social creatures who respond to our belief in them”—and, he points out, to some tasty rewards.

MINI BOX OFFICE

With awe-inspiring footage, To the Arctic immerses viewers in the stunning beauty, extreme landscapes, and diverse wildlife at the northern tip of the globe. Narrated by actress Meryl Streep, the film follows a herd of migrating caribou across the frozen tundra, then dives into the underwater world of polar bears and walruses. At the heart of this Arctic tale is the compelling story of a mother polar bear and her two cubs. Their struggle to survive on the melting ice floes underscores our responsibility to protect this wilderness and the animals who call it home.

**PRESENTED** by HSUS Genesis Award sponsors Warner Bros. Pictures and IMAX Filmed Entertainment, To the Arctic opened April 20 in select IMAX theaters (see imax.com/totheartic). Read a Q&A with director Greg MacGillivray at humanesociety.org/allanimals.