



A pet's *best friend*

Animal law advocate Cherie Travis ('05) works to protect our four-legged friends

By Elizabeth McQuern

Companion animals are part of many American families.

We spend billions of dollars each year on food and medical care for our cats and dogs, take them on vacation and include them in family portraits. But not all animals are so well-loved. Animal abuse is prevalent across the country, and millions of animals are put to sleep in U.S. shelters every year. Yet, the upside to this story includes people like animal law advocate **Cherie Travis ('05)**, who are dedicated to improving the quality of life for as many animals as possible.

Travis is an adjunct law professor at DePaul and associate director of the Center for Animal Law, where her work focuses on teaching, research and analysis of state, national and international legal matters relating to the rights and welfare of animals. She also works closely with the attorney general's office, Cook County sheriff and lawmakers helping create legislation and enforce laws to protect animals in Illinois.

In addition to her academic endeavors, she is president and co-founder of People and Animals in Community Together (PACT) Humane Society, a no-kill volunteer animal shelter and educational organization. She also is an approved humane investigator with the Illinois Department of Agriculture and recently served as chair of the Chicago Bar Association's Animal Law Committee.

Travis grew up with pets and always had an affinity for animals, but, like many of us, had no idea how widespread animal abuse was in the United States. And while early in law school she had a desire to use the law to work on behalf of animals, she assumed it would be pro bono projects for shelters outside a 9-to-5 job. Instead, animal law takes center stage in her career.

"My biggest concern is animal suffering," Travis explains. "It's not about making sure that there are a few select animals in the world that get to live their lives in exceptional conditions. I'm concerned about the majority of animals that are euthanized or suffer."

Making law, making history

The ongoing case of Bloomingdale, Illinois, animal shelter Pet Rescue Inc. is one of the best examples of Travis' dedication and ingenuity. The shelter had been accused of neglect and animal abuse by some of its volunteers, and in July 2008, the accusations were exposed in a Fox News Chicago investigative report.

Travis expected the conditions to improve at Pet Rescue after the news broke; however, during a brief visit to the shelter she was shocked to find animals still living in "deplorable conditions. There were dogs that were being kept in cages in a basement — a dungeon of a basement — and they'd been down there since 2001. These poor animals were suffering and no one was helping them."

But she was determined to make a difference in these animals' lives.

Travis needed to prove that the animals were not receiving care, and consequently, she recruited the help of two friends who were willing to adopt cats from the shelter. A vet immediately examined the animals, confirming both were very sick, with infected eyes and ears and one with an abnormally high temperature. "It was unbelievable, how obvious it was that these were sick cats," Travis says, "and how [Pet Rescue] refused to do anything about it."

With evidence of statutory violations in hand, Travis took her case to the Bloomingdale Police Department, which charged the shelter with one misdemeanor count of animal neglect. The DuPage County State's Attorney's Office later added 14 additional charges against the shelter's manager and its president, marking the first time that an animal shelter operator in Illinois has been criminally charged with animal cruelty.

The Illinois Department of Agriculture also agreed with the allegations and suspended the shelter's license, but it became unclear as to the fate of the animals under the law. Confusion exists about who has the power to enforce the laws, Travis says, due to a "woefully deficient" Animal Welfare Act. The 200 animals in the Bloomingdale case were in legal limbo: The shelter was no longer allowed to keep all of its animals, but also lacked a license to adopt them out.

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Using their broad legal knowledge to shape better and more easily enforceable animal protection laws, Travis and her colleagues are pioneers in this field. She explains, "We are borrowing from the Nursing Home Act to make amendments to the Animal Welfare Act," because nursing home laws give the Department of Public Health much greater latitude to make and follow up on inspections.

The Bloomingdale animal shelter case is making Illinois history using a new section of the Animal Welfare Act, which Travis drafted and the House passed unanimously. Other shelters also are closely watching the case because it represents a new, refined and more powerful legal approach to address animal abuse issues.

Practical perspective in the classroom

The immediacy of Travis' work extends to the classroom, where students learn from a firsthand perspective about animal law advocacy. She shows her students that animal law is not a separate, obscure niche, but that it requires knowledge of all areas of law, including contracts, torts, criminal law, property law, constitutional law and more.

"Professor Travis is dedicated to animal rights and her enthusiasm for the subject matter carries over to her teaching," says Ashlee Cuza ('09), a past student in Travis' class. She especially appreciates having her instructor's courtroom experience and community perspective brought into the classroom every day.

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“Professor Travis not only understands the law, but also taught us how it applies locally in Chicago and how we can make a difference in our communities,” Cuza explains. “She has inspired me to get involved in programs, organizations and legislation outside of my work to promote positive change in my community.”

Advocacy meets volunteer work



Travis gets a lot of personal satisfaction from her work with PACT Humane Society in Downers Grove, Illinois. The nonprofit organization, composed of more than 100 volunteers and a diverse management team, has

found adoptive homes for more than 3,000 cats and dogs and saved thousands from euthanasia in shelters across the state.

Renea Burman, who serves as vice president and director of internal operations, says Travis' role in the organization is key. “There are a lot of people who run humane societies,” she says. “There are a lot of attorneys, and there are a lot of animal welfare advocates. Cherie is the only person who wears all those hats — she is the intersection.”

PACT Humane Society also maintains a relationship with PetSmart stores in Illinois. According to Travis, PetSmart is “a very forward-thinking organization that decided years ago not to sell dogs and cats but to allow local shelters to use their stores for adoption outreach programs. It's a brilliant partnership for us,” she says. “Working with PetSmart, we compete head-to-head with the medium-sized shelters in Chicago that have resources that are three to five times what ours are, and we do 50 percent more adoptions than they do. Our animals are visible to the public at PetSmart every day of the week, and it just works incredibly well for everyone.”

“Cherie's approach to animal adoption is very pragmatic,” Burman explains. “She often says ‘we are not in the animal sheltering business, we are in the adoption business.’ Cherie works harder than anyone I know to achieve her goal of putting PACT and other shelters out of business by ending the animal overpopulation crisis through aggressive spay/neuter programs. I think that other animal welfare advocates appreciate her because she is tenacious and she gets results.”

Continual progress in animal law

As Travis explains, criminal laws contained in the Illinois Humane Care for Animals Act are pretty solid. With a few excellent legislators continuing to enhance laws and law enforcement becoming better informed on how to enforce them, she says, the welfare of animals will continue to improve.

“I think that things are starting to change in terms of people understanding the value of animals in our lives,” Travis says. “Maybe in the past the thinking was more of ‘oh, it's just a dog,’ but in the past 10 years, most states have caught up with society's views on animals. If Billy down the street beat the cat to death, a few years ago more people might have written it off as a juvenile prank. But among the reasons that law enforcement takes animal cruelty more seriously is that, in addition to people caring about animals, the data is very clear that people who hurt animals are often also willing to hurt people. There is a direct link between violence toward animals and violence toward people.”

About 100 law professors across the United States teach animal law, but no one has created an animal law career quite like Cherie Travis. She has created what she calls her “microniche,” and she couldn't be happier with the direction it's heading. [fi](#)

Center for Animal Law: A resource for the community

DePaul's Center for Animal Law is proving to be an asset to the college and the greater Chicago area. Through the Center's Dr. **Florence Wissig Dunbar** ('45) Program in Animal Law, law students, attorneys, humane investigators, animal welfare advocates and others working in the animal law field receive practical training and support.

In September 2008, Associate Director **Cherie Travis** ('05) and a colleague from the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) led a humane investigator training session for 76 police officers. An officer, who also is an approved humane investigator with the Illinois Department of Agriculture, imparts more authority during testimony in an animal abuse case. Travis is pleased that the Center can provide trainings for local and neighboring community law enforcement officials.

Center Director and Professor of Law **Margit Livingston** praises her colleague's dedication. “Cherie has tremendous energy and tremendous vision, and she's very committed to the cause of animal welfare,” Livingston says. “She sees that the existing laws protecting animals are enforced, and also strives to make the public and people in law enforcement aware of the plight of animals and the need to have them protected.”

The Center hopes to make great strides in the next few years, preparing more professionals to investigate cases and enforce animal protection laws.

For more information about the Center for Animal Law, please visit law.depaul.edu/animal_law or contact Cherie Travis at ctravis2@depaul.edu or (312) 362-6799.